

ELLERY QUEEN'S

FALL 1988
ANTHOLOGY #59

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MORE MEDIA FAVORITES

**SORRY,
WRONG
NUMBER**

**PAL
JOEY**

**DON'T
LOOK
NOW**

**CAGNEY
&
LACEY**

**Stanley Ellin
Michael Gilbert**

**John O'Hara
Daphne du Maurier
John Dickson Carr**



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ELLERY
QUEEN'S
MORE
MEDIA
FAVORITES

**FALL 1988
ANTHOLOGY #59**

**ELLERY
QUEEN'S
MORE
MEDIA
FAVORITES**

Edited by Eleanor Sullivan

**The majority of stories
in this anthology
were collected from issues of
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
edited by Ellery Queen**

**Davis Publications, Inc.
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INTRODUCTION

"JOHN BAXTER is working at the desk in his study. The room is lined with books, a cluttered, obsessive room with a low ceiling and the litter of a dedicated mind. The sun streams brightly through the narrow windows, disturbing the dusty tomes and illuminating the darkest corners of the room. The camera tracks in on JOHN, who is peering at a color transparency of a stained-glass window. His desk is covered with pieces of stained glass and he moves the pieces like bits of a jigsaw puzzle, checking them against the transparency. He is wholly absorbed in his work when quite suddenly and for no apparent reason he stiffens and looks up."

Thus begins Allan Scott's and Chris Bryant's innovative screen-play adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's "Don't Look Now," the movie (which starred Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie), like the short story, a brilliant tour de force whose mystifying elements are explained with total clarity in a blazing, horrifying finale.

In his Introduction to *Trilogy*, a collection of Truman Capote's and Eleanor Perry's screen adaptations of three Capote stories, John M. Culkin wrote: "The short story offers a rich mine of material for film-makers." The truth of this has made the gathering of material for this anthology and its predecessor, *Ellery Queen's Media Favorites*, a frustration as well as a joy, for the two collections barely scratch the surface of the short mystery fiction that has served the performing arts so well.

Of the short stories in this collection, seven were adapted for television—Michael Gilbert's "Safe!" on BBC, Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole" on *Suspense* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, Theda O. Henle's "A Harmless Vanity," John Collier's "Back for Christmas," Tonita S. Gardner's "A Girl Can't Always Have Everything," C. S. Forester's "The Turn of the Tide," and Stanley Ellin's

"The Best of Everything" on Anglia TV's *Tales of the Unexpected*. Mr. Ellin's gem was also made into a film featuring Alan Bates and Denholm Elliott.

Five other stories in this collection were made into theatrical films: John Dickson Carr's "The Gentleman from Paris" by MGM in 1951 as *The Man with a Cloak*, with Barbara Stanwyck, Joseph Cotten, and Leslie Caron; John O'Hara's "How I Am Now in Chi," one of several stories about Pal Joey that provided the plot for the Broadway (think Gene Kelly) and Hollywood (think Frank Sinatra) musicals; Marie Belloc Lowndes' "The Lodger," which was later expanded into a novel as well as four movie versions, beginning with Alfred Hitchcock's in 1926; H. C. McNeile's "Thirteen Lead Soldiers" by Twentieth Century-Fox in 1948, with Tom Conway playing Bulldog Drummond; and Michael Arlen's "Gay Falcon" by RKO in 1941, with Tom Conway's brother, George Sanders, playing the Falcon.

There are a number of reasons certain other highly qualified favorites are not included in these twin anthologies. We couldn't get the reprint rights to some stories we wanted—understandably including Agatha Christie stories that have been made into successful stage plays (e.g., "Witness for the Prosecution" and "Philomel Cottage"). Others, like Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," Aldous Huxley's "The Gioconda Smile," and Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers," we felt have been so widely anthologized as to be more easily available, or have been too recently anthologized by us (Graham Greene's "The Third Man," Cornell Woolrich's "Rear Window," Brian Garfield's "Scrimshaw"). Finally, there were those that didn't occur to us until too close to deadline (the Rashomon stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Stephen Vincent Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster, Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Suicide Club"), and several to which we had purchased the rights but couldn't fit into the editorial space. These will appear in a future Queen anthology.

Just as Bette Davis starred in the movie versions of two stories in *Media Favorites*, Barbara Stanwyck starred in movies adapted from two stories in this collection. Ms. Stanwyck, who won the American Film Institute's fifteenth Life Achievement Award last year, said of playing Mrs. Stevenson, the bedridden invalid in the 1948 movie version of *Sorry, Wrong Number* (for which she won her fourth Oscar nomination): "I had twelve days of her terror in bed . . . I don't know whether that had something to do with my hair turning grey, but it did start then."

Probably the most repeated play in the history of radio, *Sorry, Wrong Number* has also been the film, a television play, a novel, and a chilling, tip-of-the-iceberg one-act play—one of two included in this book. The other is Lillian de la Torre's widely performed *Goodbye, Miss Lizzie Borden*, which was also televised on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. In their collection, *24 Favorite One-Act Plays*, the editors Bennett Cerf and Van H. Cartmell say that the book's chief purpose is to make the one-act play more popular with an armchair audience. We hope you savor reading these two, as well as the excerpt from the novelization of the beginning of the *Cagney & Lacey* TV series—and, as an overture, a haunting lyric from Rupert Holmes' volatile *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the Tony-winning Broadway musical, now on national tour with much of the original company.

Curtain up!

E.S.



Rupert Holmes

The Garden Path to Hell

I was once your nan
Then I met a man—
Tall and all with golden hair—
That's where my end began.
I let him have his way with me (he knew his way so well)—
Led me down the garden path to Hell.
Marriage in me head,
What I got instead
Was a bed in Camden Town, and then to me he said:
"If I send around a friend, be nice to him, this swell.
Stroll him down your garden path to Hell."

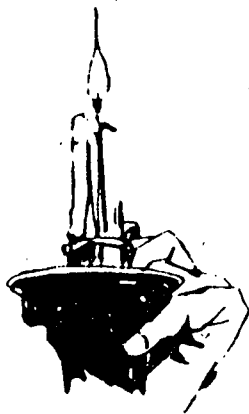
Make your bed of roses, and sleep in it,
Cuddle deep in it and pray you never wake.
Soon the deadly poppies come cropping up,
Fairly popping from the seeds of one mistake.

On my back all day
Earning Satan's pay,
I took to drink
So's not to think
Of who'd come next to play.
I gave my gent my every cent and he gave me farewell,
Leaving me to weed the path to Hell.

Life's a maze of hedges that prickle you—
As they tickle you, they tear you all about.
Strolling through the maze is amusing, too,
But confusing when you can't find your way out.

I lost my looks by then,
Couldn't draw the men,
So I learned a trade and earned
My keep with drugs, and then,
I found myself a wicked shelf where opium I sell:
"Here's a pipe for you, sir.
(Price is five and two, sir.)
Can't you see the garden?
It's such a lovely garden.
I'll take you there. I know the path so well—
To Hell."

EDITORIAL NOTE: In Rupert Holmes' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, suggested by the unfinished novel by Charles Dickens, "The Garden Path to Hell" is sung by Puffer. To remind you of the versatility a role can have, Puffer was played in the original cast by Cleo Laine, then by Loretta Swit, and, later, others. In the present production, Puffer is performed by Jean Stapleton.



John Dickson Carr

The Gentleman from Paris

Carlton House Hotel
Broadway, New-York
14th April, 1849

My dear brother:

Were my hand more steady, Maurice, or my soul less agitated, I should have written to you before this. *All is safe*: so much I tell you at once. For the rest, I seek sleep in vain, and this is not merely because I find myself a stranger and a foreigner in New-York. Listen and judge.

We discussed, I think, the humiliation that a Frenchman must go to England ere he could take passage in a reliable ship for America. The *Britannia* steam-packet departed from Liverpool on the second of the month and arrived here on the seventeenth. Do not smile, I implore you, when I tell you that my first visit on American soil was to Platt's Saloon, under Wallack's Theatre.

Great God, that voyage!

On my stomach I could hold not even champagne. For one of my height and breadth, I was weak as a child.

"Be good enough," I said to a fur-capped coachman when I had struggled through the horde of Irish immigrants, "to drive me to some fashionable place of refreshment."

The coachman had no difficulty in understanding my English, which pleased me. And how extraordinary are these "saloons"!

The saloon of M. Platt was loud with the thump of hammers cracking ice, which is delivered in large blocks. Though the hand-colored gas-globes and the rose paintings on the front of the bar-counter were as fine as we could see at the Three Provincial Brothers in Paris, I confess that the place did not smell so agreeably. A number of gentlemen, wearing hats perhaps a trifle taller than is fashionable at home, lounged at the bar-counter and shouted. I attracted no attention until I called for a sherry cobbler.

One of the bartenders, as they are called in New-York, gave me a sharp glance as he prepared the glass. "Just arrived from the old country, I bet?" said he in no unfriendly tone.

Though it seemed strange to hear France mentioned in this way, I smiled and bowed assent.

"Italian, maybe?" said he.

This bartender, of course, could not know how deadly was the insult.

"Sir," I replied, "I am a Frenchman."

And now in truth he was pleased! His fat face opened and smiled like a distorted, gold-toothed flower.

"Is that so, now!" he exclaimed. "And what might your name be? Unless"—and here his face darkened with that sudden defensiveness and suspicion which, for no reason I can discern, will often strike into American hearts—"unless," said he, "you don't want to give it?"

"Not at all," I assured him earnestly. "I am Armand de Lafayette, at your service."

My dear brother, what an extraordinary effect!

It was silence. All sounds, even the faint whistling of the gas-jets, seemed to die away in that stone-flagged room. Every man along the line of the bar was looking at me. I was conscious only of faces, mostly with whiskers under the chin instead of down the cheekbones, turned to me.

"Well, well, well!" almost sneered the bartender. "You wouldn't be no relation of the *Marquis de Lafayette*, would you?"

It was my turn to be astonished. Though our father has always forbidden us to mention the name of our late uncle, due to his republican sympathies, yet I knew he occupied small place in the history of France and it puzzled me to comprehend how these people had heard of him.

"The late *Marquis de Lafayette*," I was obliged to admit, "was my uncle."

"You better be careful, young feller," suddenly yelled a grimy little man with a pistol buckled under his long coat. "We don't like being diddled, we don't."

"Sir," I replied, taking my bundle of papers from my pocket

and whacking them down on the bar-counter, "have the goodness to examine my credentials. Should you still doubt my identity, we can then debate the matter in any way which pleases you."

"This is furrin writing," shouted the bartender. "I can't read it!"

And then—how sweet was the musical sound on my ear!—I heard a voice addressing me in my own language.

"Perhaps, sir," said the voice, in excellent French and with great stateliness, "I may be able to render you some small service."

The newcomer, a slight man of dark complexion, drawn up under an old shabby cloak of military cut, stood a little way behind me. If I had met him on the boulevards, I might not have found him very prepossessing. He had a wild and wandering eye, with an even wilder shimmer of brandy. He was not very steady on his feet. And yet, Maurice, his manner! It was such that I instinctively raised my hat, and the stranger very gravely did the same.

"And to whom," said I, "have I the honor?"

"I am Thaddeus Perley, sir, at your service."

"Another furriner!" said the grimy little man in disgust.

"I am indeed a foreigner," said M. Perley in English. "A foreigner to this dram-shop. A foreigner to this neighborhood. A foreigner to—" Here he paused, and his eyes acquired an almost frightening blaze of loathing. "Yet I never heard that the speaking or reading of French was so *very* singular an accomplishment."

Imperiously—and yet, it seemed to me, with a certain shrinking nervousness—M. Perley came closer and lifted the bundle of papers.

"Doubtless," he said loftily, "I should not be credited were I to translate these. But here," and he scanned several of the papers, "is a letter of introduction in English. It is addressed to President Zachary Taylor from the American minister at Paris."

Again, my brother, what an enormous silence! It was interrupted by a cry from the bartender, who had snatched the documents from M. Perley.

"Boys, this is no diddle," said he. "This gent is the real thing!"

"He ain't!" thundered the little grimy man with incredulity.

"He is!" said the bartender. "I'll be a son of a roe (*i.e.*, *biche*) if he ain't!"

Well, Maurice, you and I have seen how Paris mobs can change. Americans are even more emotional. In the wink of an eye hostility became frantic affection. My back was slapped, my hand wrung, my person jammed against the bar by a crowd fighting to order me more refreshment.

The name of Lafayette, again and again, rose like a holy diapason. In vain I asked why this should be so. They appeared to think I was joking and roared with laughter.

I thought of M. Thaddeus Perley as one who could supply an explanation. But in the first rush toward me, M. Perley had been flung backward. He fell sprawling in some wet stains of tobacco-juice on the floor, and now I could not see him at all. For myself, I was weak from lack of food. A full beaker of whisky, which I was obliged to drink because all eyes were on me, made my head reel. Yet I felt compelled to raise my voice above the clamor.

"Gentlemen," I implored them, "will you hear me?"

"Silence for Lafayette!" said a big but very old man with faded red whiskers. He had tears in his eyes, and he had been humming a catch called *Yankee Doodle*. "Silence for Lafayette!"

"Believe me," said I, "I am full of gratitude for your hospitality. But I have business in New-York, business of immediate and desperate urgency. If you will allow me to pay my reckoning—"

"Your money's no good here, monseer," said the bartender. "You're going to get liquored up good and proper."

"But I have no wish, believe me, to become liquored up—it might well endanger my mission! In effect, I wish to go!"

"Wait a minute," said the little grimy man, with a cunning look. "What *is* this here business?"

You, Maurice, have called me quixotic. I deny this. You have also called me imprudent. Perhaps you are right; but what choice was left to me?

"Has any gentleman here," I asked, "heard of Madame Thev-

enet? Madame Thevenet, who lives in number 23 Thomas Street, near Hudson Street?"

I had not, of course, expected an affirmative reply. Yet in addition to one or two snickers at mention of the street, several nodded their heads.

"Old miser woman?" asked a sportif character, who wore checkered trousers.

"I regret, sir, that you correctly describe her. Madame Thevenet is very rich. And I have come here," cried I, "to put right a damnable injustice!"

Struggle as I might, I could not free myself.

"How's that?" asked half a dozen.

"Madame Thevenet's daughter, Mademoiselle Claudine, lives in the worst of poverty at Paris. Madame herself has been brought here, under some spell, by a devil of a woman calling herself—Gentlemen, I implore you!"

"And I bet you," cried the little grimy man, "you're sweet on this daughter what's-her-name!" He seemed delighted. "Ain't you, now?"

How, I ask of all Providence, could these people have surprised my secret? Yet I felt obliged to tell the truth.

"I will not conceal from you," I said, "that I have in truth a high regard for Mademoiselle Claudine. But this lady, believe me, is engaged to a friend of mine, an officer of artillery."

"Then what do you *get* out of it, eh?" asked the grimy little man, with another cunning look.

The question puzzled me. I could not reply. But the bartender with the gold teeth leaned over to me.

"If you want to see the old Frenchie alive, monseer," said he, "you'd better git." (*Sic*, Maurice.) "I hearn tell she had a stroke this morning."

But a dozen voices clamored to keep me there, though this last intelligence sent me into despair. Then up rose the big and very old man with the faded whiskers: indeed, I had never realized how old, because he seemed so hale.

"Which of you was with Washington?" said he, suddenly tak-

ing hold of the fierce little man's neckcloth and speaking with contempt. "Make way for the nephew of Lafayette!"

They cheered me then, Maurice. They hurried me to the door, they begged me to return, they promised they would await me. One glance I sought—nor can I see why—for M. Thaddeus Perley. He was sitting at a table by a pillar, under an open gas-jet. His face whiter than ever, he was still wiping stains of tobacco-juice from his cloak.

Never have I seen a more mournful prospect than Thomas Street, when my cab set me down there. Perhaps it was my state of mind; for if Mme. Thevenet had died without a sou left to her daughter—you conceive it?

The houses of Thomas Street were faced with dingy yellow brick, and a muddy sky hung over the chimney-pots. It had been warm all day, yet I found my spirit intolerably oppressed. Though heaven knows our Parisian streets are dirty enough, we do not allow pigs in them. Except for these, nothing moved in the forsaken street save a blind street musician, with his dog and an instrument called a banjo—but even he was silent, too.

For some minutes, it seemed to me, I plied the knocker at Number 23 with hideous noise. Nothing stirred. Finally, one part of the door swung open a little, as for an eye. Whereupon I heard the shifting of a floor-bolt and both doors were swung open.

Need I say that facing me stood the woman whom we have agreed to call Mademoiselle Jezebel?

She said to me: "And then, M. Armand?"

"Madame Thevenet!" cried I. "She is still alive?"

"She is alive," replied my companion, looking up at me from under the lids of her greenish eyes. "But she is completely paralyzed."

I have never denied, Maurice, that Mlle. Jezebel has a certain attractiveness. She is not old or even middle-aged. Were it not that her complexion is as muddy as was the sky above us then, she would have been pretty.

"And as for Claudine," I said to her, "the daughter to madame—"

"You have come too late, M. Armand."

And well I remember that at this moment there rose up, in the mournful street outside, the tinkle of the banjo played by the street musician. It moved closer, playing a popular catch whose words run something thus:

"Oh, I come from Alabama

With my banjo on my knee;

I depart for Louisiana

My Susannah for to see."

Across the lips of mademoiselle flashed a smile of peculiar quality, like a razor-cut before the blood comes. "Gold," she whispered. "Ninety thousand persons, one hears, have gone to seek it. Go to California, M. Armand. It is the only place you will find gold."

This tune, they say, is a merry tune. It did not seem so as the dreary twanging faded away. Mlle. Jezebel, with her muddy blonde hair parted in the middle and drawn over her ears after the best fashion, faced me implacably. Her greenish eyes were wide open. Her old brown-taffeta dress, full at the bust, narrow at the waist, rustled its wide skirts as she glided a step forward.

"Have the kindness," I said, "to stand aside. I wish to enter."

Hitherto in my life I had seen her docile and meek.

"You are no relative," she said. "I will not allow you to enter."

"In that case, I regret, I must."

"If you have ever spoken one kind word to *me*," whispered mademoiselle, looking up from under her eyelids; and with her breast heaving, "one gesture of love—that is to say, of affection—you might have shared five million francs."

"Stand aside, I say!"

"As it is, you prefer a doll-faced consumptive at Paris. So be it!"

I was raging, Maurice, I confess it—yet I drew myself up with coldness. "You refer, perhaps, to Claudine Thevenet?"

"And to whom else?"

"I might remind you, mademoiselle, that the lady is pledged to my good friend, Lieutenant Delage. I have forgotten her."

"Have you?" asked our Jezebel, with her eyes on my face and a strange hungry look in them. "Well, she will die. Unless you can solve a mystery."

"A mystery?"

"I should not have said mystery, M. Armand. Because it is impossible of all solution. It is an Act of God!"

Up to this time, the glass-fronted doors of the vestibule had stood open behind her against a darkness of closed shutters in the house. There breathed out of it an odor of unswept carpets, a sourness of stale living. Someone was approaching, carrying a lighted candle.

"Who speaks?" called a man's voice, shaky but as French as Mlle. Jezebel's. "Who speaks concerning an Act of God?"

I stepped across the threshold. Mademoiselle, who never left my side, immediately closed and locked the front doors. As the candle-glimmer moved still closer in gloom, I could have shouted for joy to see the man who (as I correctly guessed) I had come to meet.

"You are M. Duroc, the lawyer!" I said. "You are my brother's friend!"

M. Duroc held the candle higher, to inspect me.

He was a big, heavy man who seemed to sag in all his flesh. In compensation for his bald head, the greyish-brown moustache flowed down and parted into two hairy fans of beard on either side of his chin. He looked at me through oval gold-rimmed spectacles—in a friendly way, but yet frightened. His voice was deep and gruff, clipping the syllables, despite his fright.

"And you—" *clip-clip*; the candle holder trembled—"you are Armand de Lafayette. I had expected you by the steam-packet today. Well, you are here. On a fool's errand, I regret."

"But why?" (And I shouted it at him, Maurice.)

I looked at mademoiselle, who was faintly smiling.

"M. Duroc!" I protested. "You wrote to my brother. You said you had persuaded madame to repent of her harshness toward her daughter!"

"Was that your duty?" asked the Jezebel, looking full at M. Duroc with her greenish eyes. "Was that your right?"

"I am a man of law," said M. Duroc. The deep monosyllables rapped, in ghostly bursts, through his parted beard. "I am correct. Very correct! And yet—"

"Who nursed her?" asked the Jezebel. "Who soothed her, fed her, wore her filthy clothes, calmed her tempers, endured her interminable abuse? *I did!*"

And yet, all the time she was speaking, this woman kept sidling and sliding against me, brushing my side, as though she would make sure of my presence there.

"Well!" said the lawyer. "It matters little now! This mystery—"

You may well believe that all these cryptic remarks, as well as reference to a mystery or an Act of God, had driven me almost frantic. I demanded to know what he meant.

"Last night," said M. Duroc, "a certain article disappeared."

"Well? Well?"

"It disappeared," said M. Duroc, drawn up like a grenadier, "but it could not conceivably have disappeared. I myself swear this! Our only suggestions as to how it might have disappeared are a toy rabbit and a barometer."

"Sir," I said, "I do not wish to be discourteous. But—"

"Am I mad, you ask?"

I bowed. If any man can manage at once to look sagging and uncertain, yet stately and dignified, M. Duroc managed it then. And dignity won, I think.

"Sir," he replied, gesturing with the candle toward the rear of the house, "Madame Thevenet lies there in her bed. She is paralyzed. She can move only her eyes and partially the lips, without speech. Do you wish to see her?"

"If I am permitted."

"Yes. That would be correct. Accompany me."

And I saw the poor old woman, Maurice. Call her harridan if you like.

It was a square room of good size, whose shutters had remained closed and locked for years. Can one smell rust? In that room with faded green wallpaper I felt I could.

One solitary candle did little more than dispel shadow. It burned atop the mantelpiece well opposite the foot of the bed, and a shaggy man, whom I afterward learned to be a police officer, sat in a green-upholstered armchair by an unlighted coal fire in the fireplace grate, picking his teeth with a knife.

"If you please, Dr. Harding!" M. Duroc called softly in English.

The long and lean American doctor, who had been bending over the bed so as to conceal from our sight the head and shoulders of Madame Thevenet, turned round. But his cadaverous body—in such fashion were madame's head and shoulders propped up against pillows—still concealed her face.

"Has there been any change?" persisted M. Duroc in English.

"There has been no change," replied the dark-complexioned Dr. Harding, "except for the worse."

"Do you want her to be moved?"

"There has never been any necessity," said the physician, picking

up his beaver hat from the bed. He spoke drily. "However, if you want to learn anything more about the toy rabbit or the barometer, you should hurry. The lady will die in a matter of hours, probably less."

And he stood to one side.

It was a heavy bed with four posts and a canopy. The bed-curtains, of some dullish-green material, were closely drawn on every side except the long side by which we saw Madame Thevenet in profile. Lean as a post, rigid, the strings of her cotton nightcap tightly tied under her chin, Madame Thevenet lay propped up there. But one eye rolled toward us, and it rolled horribly.

Up to this time the woman we call the Jezebel had said little. She chose this moment again to come brushing against my side. Her greenish eyes, lids half closed, shone in the light of M. Duroc's candle. What she whispered was: "You don't really hate me, do you?"

Maurice, I make a pause here.

Since I wrote the sentence, I put down my pen, and pressed my hands over my eyes, and once more I thought. But let me try again.

I spent just two hours in the bedroom of Madame Thevenet. At the end of the time—oh, you shall hear why!—I rushed out of that bedroom, and out of number 23 Thomas Street, like the maniac I was.

The streets were full of people, of carriages, of omnibuses, at early evening. Knowing noplacé of refuge save the saloon from which I had come, I gave its address to a cab-driver. Since I had still swallowed no food, I may have been light-headed. Yet I wished to pour out my heart to the friends who had bidden me return there. And where were they now?

A new group, all new, lounged against the bar-counter under brighter gaslight and brighter paint. Of all those who smote me on the back and cheered, none remained save the ancient giant who had implied friendship with General Washington. *He*, alas, lay helplessly drunk with his head near a sawdust spitting-box. Nevertheless, I was so moved that I took the liberty of thrusting a handful of bank-notes into his pocket. He alone remained.

Wait, there was another!

I do not believe he had remained there because of me. Yet M. Thaddeus Perley, still sitting alone at the little table by the pillar, with the open gas-jet above, stared vacantly at the empty glass in his hand.

He had named himself a foreigner; he was probably French. That was as well. For, as I lurched against the table, I was befuddled and all English had fled my wits.

"Sir," said I, "will you permit a madman to share your table?"

M. Perley gave a great start, as though roused out of thought. He was now sober: this I saw. Indeed, his shiver and haggard face were due to lack of stimulant rather than too much of it.

"Sir," he stammered, getting to his feet, "I shall be—I shall be honored by your company."

Automatically he opened his mouth to call for a waiter; his hand went to his pocket; he stopped.

"No, no, no!" said I. "If you insist, M. Perley, you may pay for the second bottle. The first is mine. I am sick at heart, and I would speak with a gentleman."

At these last words M. Perley's whole expression changed. He sat down and gave me a grave, courtly nod. His eyes, which were his most expressive feature, studied my face and my disarray.

"You are ill, M. de Lafayette," he said. "Have you so soon come to grief in this—this *civilized* country?"

"I have come to grief, yes. But not through civilization or the lack of it." And I banged my fist on the table. "I have come to grief, M. Perley, through miracles or magic. I have come to grief with a problem which no man's ingenuity can solve!"

M. Perley looked at me in a strange way. But someone had brought a bottle of brandy, with its accessories. M. Perley's trembling hand slopped a generous allowance into my glass, and an even more generous one into his own.

"That is very curious," he remarked, eyeing the glass. "A murder, was it?"

"No. But a valuable document has disappeared. The most thorough search by the police cannot find it."

Touch him anywhere, and he flinched. M. Perley, for some extraordinary reason, appeared to think I was mocking him.

"A document, you say?" His laugh was a trifle unearthly. "Come, now. Was it by any chance—a letter?"

"No, no! It was a will. Three large sheets of parchment, of the size you call foolscap. Listen!"

And as M. Perley added water to his brandy and gulped down about a third of it, I leaned across the table.

"Madame Thevenet, of whom you may have heard me speak in this cafe, was an invalid. But, until the early hours of this morning,

she was not bed-ridden. She could move and walk about her room, and so on. She had been lured away from Paris and her family by a green-eyed woman called the Jezebel.

"But a kindly lawyer of this city, M. Duroc, believed that madame suffered and had a bad conscience about her own daughter. Last night, despite the Jezebel, he persuaded madame at last to sign a will leaving all her money to this daughter.

"And the daughter, Claudine, is in mortal need of it! From my brother and myself, who have more than enough, she will not accept a sou. Her affianced, Lieutenant Delage, is as poor as she. But, unless she leaves France for Switzerland, she will die. I will not conceal from you that Claudine suffers from that dread disease we politely call consumption."

M. Perley stopped with his glass again halfway to his mouth.

He believed me now, I sensed it. Yet under the dark hair, tumbled on his forehead, his face had gone as white as his neat, mended shirt-frill.

"So very little a thing is money!" he whispered. "So very little a thing!"

And he lifted the glass and drained it.

"You do not think I am mocking you, sir?"

"No, no!" said M. Perley, shading his eyes with one hand. "I knew myself of one such case. She is dead. Pray continue."

"Last night, I repeat, Madame Thevenet changed her mind. When M. Duroc paid his weekly evening visit with the news that I should arrive today, madame fairly chattered with eagerness and a kind of terror. Death was approaching, she said; she had a presentiment."

As I spoke, Maurice, there returned to me the image of that shadowy, arsenic-green bedroom in the shuttered house, and what M. Duroc had told me.

"Madame," I continued, "cried out to M. Duroc that he must bolt the bedroom door. She feared the Jezebel, who lurked but said nothing. M. Duroc drew up to her bedside a portable writing-desk, with two good candles.

"For a long time, madame spoke, pouring out contrition, self-abasement, the story of an unhappy marriage, all of which M. Duroc, sweating with embarrassment, was obliged to write down until it covered three large parchment sheets.

"But it was done, M. Perley!

"The will, in effect, left everything to her daughter, Claudine. It revoked a previous will by which all had been left—and this can be

done in French law, as we both know—to Jezebel of the muddy complexion and the muddy yellow hair.

“Well, then!

“M. Duroc sallies out into the street, where he finds two sober fellows, who come in. Madame signs the will, M. Duroc sands it, and the two men from the street affix their signatures as witnesses. Then they are gone. M. Duroc folds the will lengthways and prepares to put it into his carpetbag. Now, M. Perley, mark what follows!

“‘No, no, no!’ cries madame, with the shadow of her peaked night-cap wagging on the locked shutters beyond. ‘I wish to keep it—for this one night!’

“‘For this one night, madame?’ asks M. Duroc.

“‘I wish to press it against my heart,’ says Madame Thevenet. ‘I wish to read it once, twice, a thousand times! M. Duroc, what time is it?’

“Whereupon he takes out his gold repeater and opens it. To his astonishment, it is one o’clock in the morning. Yet he touches the spring of the repeater and its pulse-beat rings one.

“‘M. Duroc,’ pleads Madame Thevenet, ‘remain here with me for the rest of the night!’

“‘Madame!’ cries M. Duroc, shocked to the very fans of his beard. ‘That would not be correct.’

“‘Yes, you are right,’ says madame. And never, swears the lawyer, has he seen her less bleary of eye, more alive with wit and cunning, more the great lady of ruin, than there in that green and shadowy and foul-smelling room.

“Yet this very fact puts her in more and more terror of the Jezebel, who is never seen. She points to M. Duroc’s carpetbag.

“‘I think you have much work to do, dear sir?’

“M. Duroc groaned. ‘The Good Lord knows that I have!’

“‘Outside the only door of this room,’ says madame, ‘there is a small dressing-room. Set up your writing-desk beside the door there, so that no one may enter without your knowledge. Do your work there—you shall have a lamp or many candles. Do it,’ shrieks madame, ‘for the sake of Claudine and for the sake of an old friendship!’

“Very naturally, M. Duroc hesitated.

“‘She will be hovering,’ pleads Madame Thevenet, pressing the will against her breast. ‘This I shall read and read and read, and sanctify with my tears. If I find I am falling asleep,’ and here the old lady looked cunning, ‘I shall hide it. But no matter! Even she cannot penetrate through locked shutters and a guarded door.’

"Well, in fine, the lawyer at length yielded.

"He set up his writing-desk against the very doorpost outside the door. When he last saw madame before closing the door, he saw her in profile with the green bed-curtains drawn except on that side, propped up, with a tall candle burning on a table at her right hand.

"Ah, that night! I think I see M. Duroc at his writing-desk, as he has told me, in an airless dressing-room where no clock ticked. I see him at times removing his oval spectacles to press his smarting eyes. I see him returning to his legal papers, while his pen scratched through the wicked hours of the night.

"He heard nothing, or virtually nothing, until five o'clock in the morning. Then, which turned him cold, he heard a cry which he described as being like that of a deaf-mute.

"The communicating door had not been bolted on Madame Thevenet's side, in case she needed help. M. Duroc rushed into the other room.

"On the table, at madame's right hand, the tall candle had burnt down to a flattish mass of wax, over which still hovered a faint blueish flame. Madame herself lay rigid in her peaked nightcap. That revival of spirit last night, or remorse in her bitter heart, had brought on the last paralysis. Though M. Duroc tried to question her, she could move only her eyes.

"Then M. Duroc noticed that the will, which she had clutched as a doomed religious might clutch a crucifix, was not in her hand or on the bed. 'Where is the will?' he shouted at her, as though she were deaf, too. 'Where is the will?'

"Madame Thevenet's eyes fixed on him. Then they moved down and looked steadily at a trumpery toy—a rabbit, perhaps four inches high, made of pink velour or the like—which lay on the bed. Again she looked at M. Duroc, as though to emphasize this. Then her eyes rolled, this time with dreadful effort, toward a large barometer, shaped like a warming-pan, which hung on the wall beside the door. Three times she did this before the blueish candle-flame flickered and went out."

And I, Armand de Lafayette, paused here in my recital to M. Perley.

Again I became aware that I was seated in a garish saloon, swilling brandy, amid loud talk that beat the air. There was a thumping noise from the theater above our heads and faint strains of music.

"The will," I said, "was not stolen. Not even the Jezebel could have melted through locked shutters or a guarded door. The will was not

hidden, because no inch of the room remains unsearched. *Yet the will is gone!*"

I threw a glance across the table at M. Perley.

To me, I am sure, the brandy had given strength and steadied my nerves. With M. Perley I was not so sure. He was a little flushed. That slightly wild look, which I had observed before, had crept up especially into one eye, giving his whole face a somewhat lopsided appearance. Yet all his self-confidence had returned. He gave me a little crooked smile. I struck the table. "Do you honor me with your attention, M. Perley?"

"What song the Sirens sang," he said to me, "or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond *all* conjecture."

"They are beyond *my* conjecture!" I cried. "And so is this!"

M. Perley extended his hand, spread the fingers, and examined them as one who owns the universe. "It is some little time," he remarked, "since I have concerned myself with these trifles." His eyes retreated into a dream. "Yet I have given some trifling aid, in the past, to the prefect of the Parisian police."

"You are a Frenchman! I knew it! And the police?" Seeing his lofty look, I added: "As an amateur, understood?"

"Understood!" Then his delicate hand—it would be unjust to call it claw-like—shot across the table and fastened on my arm. The strange eyes burned toward my face. "A little more detail!" he pleaded humbly. "A little more, I beg of you! This woman, for instance, you call the Jezebel?"

"It was she who met me at the house."

"And then?"

I described for him my meeting with the Jezebel, with M. Duroc, and our entrance to the sickroom, where the shaggy police-officer sat in the armchair and the saturnine doctor faced us from beside the bed.

"This woman," I exclaimed, with the room vividly before my eyes as I described it, "seems to have conceived for me—forgive me—a kind of passion. No doubt it was due to some idle compliments I once paid her at Paris.

"As I have explained, the Jezebel is *not* unattractive, even if she would only—again forgive me—wash her hair. Nevertheless, when once more she brushed my side and whispered, 'You don't really hate me, do you?' I felt little less than horror. It seemed to me that in some fashion I was responsible for the whole tragedy.

"While we stood beside the bed, M. Duroc the lawyer poured out the story I have recounted. There lay the poor paralytic, and confirmed it with her eyes. The toy rabbit, a detestable pink color, lay in its same position on the bed. Behind me, hung against the wall by the door, was the large barometer.

"Apparently for my benefit, Madame Thevenet again went through her dumb show with imploring eyes. She would look at the rabbit. Next—as M. Duroc had not mentioned—she would roll her eyes all round her, for some desperate yet impenetrable reason, before fixing her gaze on the barometer.

"It meant—what?

"The lawyer spoke then. 'More light!' gulped out M. Duroc. 'If you must have closed shutters and windows, then let us at least have more light!'

"The Jezebel glided out to fetch candles. During M. Duroc's explanation he had several times mentioned my name. At first mention of it, the shaggy police-officer jumped and put away his clasp-knife. He beckoned to the physician, Dr. Harding, who went over for a whispered conference.

"Whereupon the police-officer sprang up. 'Mr. Lafayette!' And he swung my hand pompously. 'If I'd known it was you, Mr. Lafayette, I wouldn'ta sat there like a bump on a log.'

"'You are an officer of police, sir,' said I. 'Can you think of no explanation?'

"He shook his head.

"'These people are Frenchies, Mr. Lafayette, and you're an American,' he said, with somewhat conspicuous lack of logic. 'If they're telling the truth—'

"'Let us assume that!'

"'I can't tell you where the old lady's will is,' he stated positively. 'But I can tell you where it ain't. It ain't hidden in this room!'

"'But surely—' I began in despair.

"At this moment the Jezebel, her brown-taffeta dress rustling, glided back into the room with a handful of candles and a tin box of the new-style Lucifer matches. She lighted several candles, sticking them on any surface in their own grease.

"There were one or two fine pieces of furniture, but the mottled-marble tops were chipped and stained, the gilt sides cracked. There were a few mirrors, creating mimic spectral life. I saw a little more clearly the faded green paper of the walls, and what I perceived to be the partly open door of a cupboard. The floor was of bare boards.

"All this while I was conscious of two pairs of eyes—the imploring gaze of Madame Thevenet and the amorous gaze of the Jezebel. One or the other I could have endured, but both together seemed to suffocate me.

"'Mr. Duroc here,' said the shaggy police-officer, clapping the distressed advocate on the shoulder, 'sent a messenger in a cab at half past five this morning. And what time did we get here? I ask you and I tell you! Six o'clock!'

"Then he shook his finger at me in a kind of pride and fury of efficiency. 'Why, Mr. Lafayette, there's been fourteen men in this room from six this morning until just before you got here!'

"'To search for Madame Thevenet's will, you mean?'

"The shaggy man nodded portentously, and folded his arms.

"'Floor's solid.' He stamped on the bare boards. 'Walls and ceiling? Nary an inch missed.'

"'But Madame Thevenet,' I persisted, 'was not a complete invalid until this morning. She could move about. If she became afraid of—the name of the Jezebel choked me—if she became afraid and *did* hide the will—'

"'Where'd she hide it? Tell me.'

"'In the furniture, then?'

"'Cabinet-maker's been in, Mr. Lafayette. No secret compartments.'

"'In one of the mirrors?'

"'Took the back of 'em off. No will hid there.'

"'Up the chimney!' I cried.

"'Sent a chimney-sweep up there,' replied my companion in a ruminating way. Each time I guessed, he would leer at me in friendly and complacent challenge. 'Ye-es, I reckon we're pretty smart. But we didn't find no will.'

"The pink rabbit also seemed to leer from the bed. I saw madame's eyes. Once again, as a desperate mind will fasten on trifles, I observed the strings of the nightcap beneath her scrawny chin. But I looked again at the toy rabbit.

"'Has it occurred to you,' I said triumphantly, 'to examine the bed and bedstead of Madame Thevenet herself?'

"My shaggy friend went to her bedside.

"'Poor old woman,' he said. He spoke as though she were already a corpse. Then he turned round. 'We lifted her out, just as gentle as a newborn babe—didn't we, ma'am? No hollow bedposts! Nothing

in the canopy! Nothing in the frame or the featherbeds or the curtains or the bedclothes!

"Suddenly he became angry, as though he wished to be rid of the whole matter. 'And it ain't in the toy rabbit,' he said, 'because you can see we slit it up, if you look close. And it ain't in that barometer there. It just—ain't here.'

"There was a silence as heavy as the dusty, hot air of this room.

"It is here,' murmured M. Duroc in his gruff voice. 'It must be here!'

"The Jezebel stood there meekly, with downcast eyes.

"And I, in my turn, confess that *I* lost my head. I stalked over to the barometer and tapped it. Its needle, which already indicated, 'Rain, cold,' moved still further toward that point.

"I was not insane enough to hit it with my fist. But I crawled on the floor, in search of a secret hiding-place. I felt along the wall. The police-officer—who kept repeating that nobody must touch anything and he would take no responsibility until he went off duty at something o'clock—I ignored.

"What at length gave me pause was the cupboard, already thoroughly searched. In the cupboard hung a few withered dresses and gowns, as though they had shriveled along with Madame Thevenet's body. But on the shelf of the cupboard—

"On the shelf stood a great number of perfume bottles: even today, I fear, many of our countrymen think perfume a substitute for water and soap, and the state of madame's hands would have confirmed this. *But*, on the shelf were a few dusty novels. There was a crumpled and begrimed copy of yesterday's New-York *Sun*. This newspaper did not contain a will, but it did contain a black beetle, which ran out across my hand.

"In a disgust past describing, I flung down the beetle and stamped on it. I closed the cupboard door, acknowledging defeat. Madame Thevenet's will had vanished. And at the same second, in that dim green room—still badly lighted, with only a few more candles—two voices cried out.

"One was my own voice:

"*'In God's name, where is it?'*

"The other was the deep voice of M. Duroc:

"*'Look at that woman! She knows!'*

"And he meant the Jezebel.

"M. Duroc, with his beard-fans atremble, was pointing to a mirror—a little blurred, as these mirrors were. Our Jezebel had been

looking into the mirror, her back turned to us. Now she dodged, as at a stone thrown.

"With good poise our Jezebel writhed this movement into a curtsey, turning to face us. But not before I also had seen that smile—like a razor-cut before the blood comes—as well as full knowledge, mocking knowledge, shining out of wide-open eyes in the mirror.

"'You spoke to me, M. Duroc?' She murmured the reply, also in French.

"'Listen to me!' the lawyer said formally. 'This will is *not* missing. It is in this room. You were not here last night. Something has made you guess the truth. You know where it is.'

"'Are you unable to find it?' asked the Jezebel in surprise.

"'Stand back, young man!' M. Duroc said to me. 'I ask you something, mademoiselle, in the name of justice.'

"'Ask!' said the Jezebel.

"'If Claudine Thevenet inherits the money to which she is entitled, you will be well paid—yes, overpaid! You know Claudine. You know that!'

"'I know it.'

"'But if the new will be *not* found,' said M. Duroc, again waving me back, 'then you inherit everything. And Claudine will die. For it will be assumed—'

"'Yes!' said the Jezebel, with one hand pressed against her breast. 'You yourself, M. Duroc, testify that all night a candle was burning at madame's bedside. Well! The poor woman, whom I loved and cherished, repented of her ingratitude toward me. She burnt this new will at the candle-flame; she crushed its ashes to powder and blew them away!'

"'Is that true?' cried M. Duroc.

"'They will assume it,' smiled the Jezebel, 'as you say.' She looked at me. 'And for you, M. Armand!'

"She glided closer. I can only say that I saw her eyes uncovered—or, if you wish to put it so, her soul and flesh together.

"'I would give you everything on earth,' she said. 'But I will not give you the doll-face in Paris.'

"'Listen to me!' I said to her, so agitated that I seized her shoulders. 'You are out of your senses! You cannot give Claudine to me—she will marry another man!'

"'And do you think that matters to me,' asked the Jezebel with her green eyes full on mine, 'as long as you still love her?'

"There was a small crash as someone dropped a knife on the floor.

"We three, I think, had completely forgotten that we were not alone. There were two spectators, although they did not comprehend our speech.

"The saturnine Dr. Harding now occupied the green armchair. His long thin legs, in tight black trousers with strap under the boot-instep, were crossed and looked spidery; his high beaver hat glimmered on his head. The police-officer, who was picking his teeth with a knife when I first saw him, had now dropped the knife when he tried to trim his nails.

"But both men sensed the atmosphere. Both were alert, feeling out with the tentacles of their nerves. The police-officer shouted at me. 'What's this gabble?' he said. 'What's a-gitting in your head?'

"Grotesquely, it was that word 'head' which gave me my inspiration.

" 'The nightcap!' I exclaimed in English.

" 'What nightcap?'

"For the nightcap of Madame Thevenet had a peak; it was large; it was tightly tied under the chin; it might well conceal a flat-pressed document which—but you understand. The police-officer, dull-witted as he appeared, grasped the meaning in a flash. And how I wished I had never spoken! For the fellow meant well, but he was not gentle.

"As I raced round the curtained sides of the bed, the police-officer was holding a candle in one hand and tearing off madame's nightcap with the other. He found no will there, no document at all—only straggly wisps of hair on a skull grown ancient before its time.

"Madame Thevenet had been a great lady once. It must have been the last humiliation. Two tears overflowed her eyes and ran down her cheeks. She lay propped up there in a nearly sitting position, but something seemed to wrench inside her. And she closed her eyes forever.

"And the Jezebel laughed.

"That is the end of my story. That is why I rushed out of the house like a madman. The will has vanished as though by magic—or is it still there by magic? In any case, you find me at this table—grubby and disheveled and much ashamed."

For a little time after I had finished my narrative to M. Perley in the saloon, it seemed to me that the bar-counter was a trifle quieter. But a faint stamping continued from the theater above our

heads. Then all was hushed, until a chorus rose to a tinkle of many banjos.

"Oh, I come from Alabama
With my banjo on my knee;
I depart for Louisiana—"

Enough! The song soon died away, and M. Thaddeus Perley did not even hear it.

He sat looking down into an empty glass, so that I could not see his face. "Sir," he remarked almost bitterly, "you are a man of good heart. I am glad to be of service in a problem so trifling as this."

"Trifling!"

His voice was a little husky, but not slurred. His hand turned the glass round and round.

"Will you permit two questions?" asked M. Perley.

"Two questions? Ten thousand!"

"More than two will be unnecessary." Still M. Perley did not look up. "This toy rabbit, of which so much was made: I would know its exact position on the bed?"

"It was almost at the foot of the bed, and about the middle in a crossways direction."

"Ah, so I had imagined. Were the three sheets of parchment forming the will written upon two sides or upon only one?"

"I had not told you, M. Perley. But M. Duroc said upon one side only."

M. Perley raised his head. His face was now flushed and distorted with drink, his eye grown wild. In his cups he was as proud as Satan, and as disdainful of others' intelligence, yet he spoke with dignity, and with careful clearness.

"It is ironic, M. de Lafayette, that I should tell you how to lay your hand on the missing will and the elusive money, since, upon my word, I have never been able to perform a like service for myself." And he smiled, as at some secret joke. "Perhaps," he added, "it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault."

I could only look at him in bewilderment.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain! A little *too* self-evident!"

"You mock me, sir. I will not—"

"Take me as I am," said M. Perley, whacking the foot of the glass on the table, "or leave me. Besides"—here his wandering eye encountered a list of steam-sailings pasted against the wall—"I leave tomorrow by the *Parnassus* for England, and then for France."

"I meant no offense, M. Perley! If you have knowledge, speak!"

"Madame Thevenet," he said, carefully pouring himself more brandy, "hid the will in the middle of the night. Does it puzzle you that she took such precautions to hide the will? But the element of the *outré* must always betray itself. The Jezebel must not find that will! Yet Madame Thevenet trusted nobody—not even the worthy physician who attended her. If Madame were to die of a stroke, the police would be there and must soon, she was sure, discover her simple device. Even if she were paralyzed, it would ensure the presence of other persons in the room to act as unwitting guards.

"Your cardinal error," M. Perley continued dispassionately, "was one of ratiocination—rather, of inaccurate ratiocination. You tell me that Madame Thevenet, to give you a hint, looked fixedly at some point near the foot of the bed. Why do you assume that she was looking at the toy rabbit?"

"Because," I replied hotly, "the toy rabbit was the only object she could have looked at!"

"Pardon me, but it was *not*. You several times informed me that the bed-curtains were closely drawn together on three sides. They were drawn on all but the 'long' side toward the door. Therefore, the ideal reasoner, without having seen the room, may safely say that the curtains were drawn together at the foot of the bed?"

"Yes, true!"

"After looking fixedly at this point represented by the toy, Madame Thevenet then 'rolls her eyes all round her'—in your phrase. May we assume that she wishes the curtains to be drawn back, so that she may see something *beyond* the bed?"

"It is—possible, yes!"

"It is more than possible, as I shall demonstrate. Let us direct our attention, briefly, to the incongruous phenomenon of the barometer on another wall. The barometer indicates 'Rain, cold.'"

Here M. Perley's thin shoulders drew together under the old military cloak.

"Well," he said, "the cold is on its way. Yet this day, for April, has been warm outside, and indoors oppressively hot?"

"Yes! Of course!"

"You yourself," continued M. Perley, inspecting his fingernails, "told me what was directly opposite the foot of the bed. Let us suppose that the bed-curtains are drawn open. Madame Thevenet, in her nearly seated position, is looking *downward*. What would she have seen?"

"The fireplace!" I cried. "The grate of the fireplace!"

"Already we have a link with the weather. And what, as you have specifically informed me, was in the grate of the fireplace?"

"An unlighted coal fire!"

"Exactly. And what is essential for the composition of such a fire? We need coal, we need kindling wood, but primarily and above all we need—"

"*Paper!*" I cried.

"In the cupboard of that room," said M. Perley, with his disdainful little smile, "was a very crumpled and begrimed—mark that, not dusty—copy of *yesterday's New-York Sun*. To light fires is the most common, and indeed the best, use for our daily press. The copy had been used to build yesterday's fire. But something else, during the night, was substituted for it. You yourself remarked the extraordinarily dirty state of Madame Thevenet's hands."

M. Perley swallowed the brandy and his flush deepened. "Sir," he said loudly, "you will find the will crumpled up, with the ends most obviously protruding under the coal and wood in the fireplace grate. Even had anyone taken the fire to pieces, he would have found only what appeared to be dirty blank paper, written side undermost, which could never be a valuable will. It was too self-evident to be seen. —Now go!"

"Go?" I echoed stupidly.

M. Perley rose from his chair. "Go, I say!" he shouted, with an even wilder eye. "The Jezebel could not light that fire. It was too warm, for one thing, and all day there were police-officers with instructions that an outsider must touch nothing. But now? *Madame Thevenet kept warning you that the fire must not be lighted, or the will would be destroyed!*"

"Will you await me here?" I called over my shoulder.

"Yes, yes! And perhaps there will be peace for the wretched girl with—with the lung-trouble."

Even as I ran out of the door I saw him, grotesque and pitiful, slump across the table. Hope, rising and surging, seemed to sweep me along like the crack of the cabman's whip. But when I reached my destination, hope receded.

The shaggy police-officer was just descending the front steps.

"None of us coming back here, Mr. Lafayette!" he called cheerily. "Old Mrs. What's-her-name went and burnt that will at a candle last night. —Here, what's o'clock?"

The front door was unlocked. I raced through that dark house and burst into the rear bedroom.

The corpse still lay in the big, gloomy bed. Every candle had flickered almost down to its socket. The police-officer's clasp-knife, forgotten since he had dropped it, still lay on the bare boards. But the Jezebel was there.

She knelt on the hearth with the tin box of Lucifer matches she had brought there earlier. The match spurted, a blueish fire; I saw her eagerness; she held the match to the grate.

"A Lucifer," I said, "in the hand of a Jezebel!" And I struck her away from the grate, so that she reeled against a chair and fell. Large coals and small rattled down in puffs of dust as I plunged my hands into the unlighted fire. Little sticks, sawed sticks; and I found it there—crumpled parchment-sheets, but incontestably madame's will.

"M. Duroc!" I called. "M. Duroc!"

You and I, my brother Maurice, have fought the Citizen-King with bayonets, as we now fight the upstart Bonapartist—we need not be ashamed of tears. I confess, then, that the tears overran my eyes and blinded me. I scarcely saw M. Duroc as he hurried into the room.

Certainly I did not see the Jezebel stealthily pick up the police-officer's knife. I noticed nothing at all until she flew at me, and stabbed me in the back.

Peace, my brother: I have assured you all is well. At the time, faith, I was not much conscious of any hurt. I bade M. Duroc, who was trembling, to wrench out the knife; I borrowed his roomy greatcoat to hide the blood; I must hurry back to that little table under the gas-jet.

I planned it all on my way back. M. Perley, apparently a stranger in this country, disliked it and was evidently very poor even in France. But *we* are not precisely paupers. Even with his intense pride, he could not refuse—for such a service—a sum which would comfort him for the rest of his life. Back I plunged into the saloon, and hurried down it. Then I stopped. The little round table by the pillar, under the flaring gas-jet, was empty.

How long I stood there I cannot tell. The back of my shirt, which at first had seemed full of blood, now stuck to the borrowed greatcoat. All of a sudden I caught sight of the fat-faced bartender with the gold teeth who had been on service that afternoon and had returned now. As a mark of respect, he came out from behind the bar-counter to greet me.

"Where is the gentleman who was sitting at that table?"

I pointed to it. My voice, in truth, must have sounded so hoarse and strange that he mistook it for anger.

"Don't you worry about that, monseer!" said he reassuringly. "That's been tended to! We threw the drunken tramp out of here!"

"You threw—"

"Right bang in the gutter. Had to crawl along in it before he could stand up." My bartender's face was pleased and vicious. "Ordered a bottle of best brandy, and couldn't pay for it." The face changed again. "Goddelmighty, monseer, what's wrong?"

"I ordered that brandy."

"He didn't say so when the waiter brought me over. Just looked me up and down, crazylike, and said a gentleman would give his I.O.U. Gentleman!"

"M. Perley," I said, restraining an impulse to kill him, "is a friend of mine. He departs for France early tomorrow morning. Where is his hotel? Where can I find him?"

"Perley!" sneered my companion. "That ain't even his real name, I hearn tell. Gits high-and-mighty ideas from upper Broadway. But his real name's on the I.O.U."

A surge of hope, once more, almost blinded me. "Did you keep that I.O.U.?"

"Yes, I kepp it," growled the bartender, fishing in his pocket. "God knows why, but I kepp it."

And at last, Maurice, I triumphed!

True, I collapsed from my wound, and the fever would not let me remember that I must be at the dock when the *Parnassus* steam-packet departed from New-York next morning. I must remain here, shut up in a hotel room and unable to sleep at night, until I can take ship for home. But where I failed, you can succeed. He was to leave on the morrow by the *Parnassus* for England, and then for France—so he told me. You can find him—in six months at the most. In six months, I give you my word, he will be out of misery forever!

"I.O.U.," reads the little slip, "*for one bottle of your best brandy, forty-five cents. Signed: Edgar A. Poe.*"

I remain, Maurice,
Your affectionate brother,
Armand

EDITORIAL NOTE: Needless to tell you, now that you have finished "The Gentleman from Paris," you have just read a brilliant tour de

force—a double tour de force. Not only has John Dickson Carr devised a scintillating mystery—the “miracle” problem as distinguished from the “locked room”—but he has also challenged you to identify his detective character. The true identity of Thaddeus Perley is a magnificent “unexpected ending”—at least, we hope it was a thunderclap of surprise.

Those of you who deduced or guessed the identity of Thaddeus Perley know how lavishly Mr. Carr spread his clues throughout the story. But those of you who did not realize that Mr. Carr had a double trick up his sleeve may enjoy a recapitulation of the signs and symbols which identified Thaddeus Perley as the Father of the Detective Story, Edgar A. Poe himself.

First, there was the temporal clue: the story takes place in April 1849, exactly eight years after Poe wrote “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the world’s first detective story, and a mere six months before he died.

Next, the portrait clue: Thaddeus Perley was described as a slight man of dark complexion, wearing a shabby coat of military cut; he had a dark moustache, wild and wandering eyes, and was in his cups—“not very steady on his feet.” Surely this is a ‘tec tintype of Edgar Allan Poe.

Next, the literary clue: Perley’s reference to “what song the Sirens sang, and what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond *all* conjecture.” This is a quotation from Sir Thomas Browne’s *Dedication to Urn-Burial*, but infinitely more revealing, it is the epigraph which prefaces Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.”

Next, the criminological clue: Perley’s statement that he had given aid to the prefect of the Parisian police was a reference, of course, to Monsieur G—— in “The Purloined Letter.”

Next, the psychological clue: Perley’s comments on the insoluble mystery brought to him by the Marquis de Lafayette: “Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault. Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain! A little *too* self-evident!” These are the precise words Dupin used to describe the supposedly insoluble mystery in “The Purloined Letter”!

Next, the creative clue: the missing will in “The Gentleman from Paris” is hidden in the very spirit of the missing document in “The Purloined Letter”—the perfect, the identical spirit! Indeed, as so often happens in this ingenious world of ours, the pupil has outdone the master: the hiding place of the will is even cleverer than the

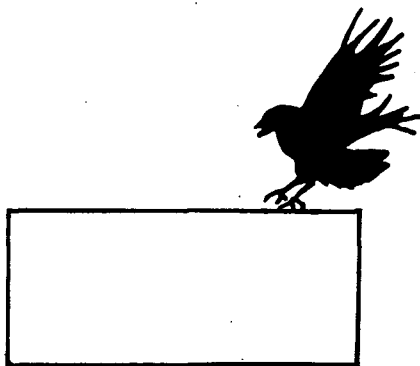
hiding place of the letter—no mean accomplishment by Mr. Carr, even with the advantages of more than a century of detective-story development.

And finally, the master clue—the name of the detective character. It is an established fact that Poe often used assumed names, the best known of which are Edgar A. Perry, Henri le Rennet, and Edward S. T. Grey. But on page 626, Volume II, of Hervey Allen's *ISRAFEL: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Doran, 1927), you will find a quotation from *Reminiscences of Gabriel Harrison* (*The New York Times*, March 1899). In 1844—five years before the events in Mr. Carr's story—Gabriel Harrison ran a tobacco and wine shop in lower Manhattan; he was also president of the White Eagle Political Club. Poe once visited Harrison's store, asked for some tobacco, discovered that he had no money to pay for it, and was given the tobacco free by Harrison. Poe was so grateful for this kindness that he wrote a campaign song for the political club and presented it to Harrison, who recalled the incident as follows:

"I was delighted and wanted to pay him something for his trouble, but the only thing he would accept was a bag of my best coffee. As he was going I said I should like to know his name.

"'Certainly,' he answered, with a faint smile. 'Thaddeus Perley, at your service.'"

ELLERY QUEEN



Theda O. Henle

A Harmless Vanity

It was—until it ended—an ordinary domestic triangle: a husband, a wife, and another, younger woman. For the three participants, of course, it was not, by any stretch of their imaginations, ordinary, and for the wife it was shattering.

A kind, meddlesome friend told her that George had a mistress in La Mesa, and she wondered why she hadn't guessed without being told. He'd been careless enough, heaven knows, counting on her to be credulous and blind—or not giving a damn? She led a very full, happy life—even without children—and had never been one to anticipate trouble. Her love for him was unchanged, and she never questioned his for her, never looked for grief. But the danger signs were there—if she'd ever looked.

His lovemaking had become perfunctory and infrequent. She'd thought this was because he was adjusting to a new job, a substantial advance which involved a much more demanding schedule. He'd taken to coming home late several evenings a week. That, too, was accounted for by his new responsibilities. In fact, all the alterations in his behavior—his inattention, his growing irritation with her unprepossessing looks, haphazard housekeeping, and sloppy work habits, his withdrawal when she made amorous advances—everything had been attributed to the new job and the absurd air of importance that apparently came with it. His "position" called for a grander background, he told her.

"I owe it to myself—and to the prestige of the firm. My home should look like two hundred and fifty thousand—God knows it cost enough! And my wife should, too. You're not a grubby student any more. You're an established artist."

He hadn't liked it when she laughed at him.

"A man is judged as much by appearances as by his superior qualifications," he said.

Imagine George talking like that even a year ago! Mary had been sure he was going through a temporary phase, that his common sense and humor would surface and he'd settle down and be himself again. Not for a moment had she suspected that the changes she

saw in him could be permanent—or that his love for her was changing, too.

It was this that made the sick pain so much harder to bear, her naive stupidity. She knew that nothing stays the same; she wasn't really stupid, but she had exempted her marriage and his love as glowing exceptions. Until death us do part. God, how could she have been so blind—and so complacent?

It took Mary Hitchman agonizing hours to absorb the shock—and the pain which, surprisingly, was so physical. It took interminable, lost days before she gained an upper hand over herself and was ready to face the facts and decide what she would do about them. It was the hardest thing she had ever done, and the first hard thing she'd done alone. Even facing the fact that she had "a nice talent" but no genius had been shared.

Fact number one: George loved someone else—was probably making love to someone else right now, someone younger, someone who evidently did look like \$250,000!

Fact number two: He would never divorce her because her family had money, and he liked being wealthy. This other woman was hardly more than a girl, Liz said, and didn't have a cent.

Fact number three: She would leave him if she had to. She wouldn't divorce him if California laws made her give him so much as half a dollar, but to live with him in a marriage of polite pretense was unthinkable. There would be no dragged-out, miserable status quo for her! Mr. George Hitchman, Esquire, wasn't going to have his cake in the suburbs and a wife with a grand background in San Diego if she had anything to say about it! She'd have to talk to him soon, make all this clear, but first she had to meet the woman.

She was a schoolteacher and her name was Carol James. George must have met her last winter when he gave a series of lectures at San Diego State. Mary thought she remembered his mentioning a young woman with admiration—a serious, promising Midwesterner, he'd said, who was working evenings toward her Master's degree, and who had none of the far-out notions he deplored in other younger people. But he hadn't mentioned her lately. Mutual friends on the faculty at San Diego State knew about the affair, had seen George and Carol James on the campus, in the park, and once at a motel in East San Diego. They liked the girl, Liz Ferguson told Mary, and they did not like what George was doing to her. He hadn't told her he was married—had, in fact, asked Liz and Dave Ferguson not to tell her.

"Let me handle this in my own way and in my own time," he'd said, but he had not thought to ask them not to tell his wife.

Mary faced her facts, made her decisions, and felt better because she had given herself goals and deadlines, and something to do. Inaction is the worst liniment for disaster. She'd meet Carol James, perhaps even talk to her. That would have to wait for the atmosphere and the reality of the moment. They might never get beyond trivialities—how could she know before she saw her? She only knew she must meet the woman George was loving. She must assess the magnitude of her loss, the strength of the competition, before she talked to George—or a lawyer.

She'd manage her confrontation casually, somehow, but before that she would spend some time and money in a beauty parlor and a boutique. Like so many other complacent wives, she had let herself go disgracefully. Now that the horse was loose, she'd do something about the barn door. A facial and a manicure. She'd have her hair cut short. She'd have a permanent. Better yet, she'd have it dyed. She should have done it years ago. Her long unwieldy hair only aggravated the headache she'd suffered almost without letup since Liz had told her. Bouts of ugly, stormy weeping still caught her unaware, but at least she could cut all that hair off.

George wouldn't even notice! It was a long time since he'd praised her hair, or anything else—or *anything else!* And no wonder, she thought, staring wildly into a mirror: she looked positively plain. She looked old, and she wasn't forty yet. She could still compete for a man's attention, and by God she would! She'd give George the glamour wife he wanted, and maybe it wouldn't be too late. She could do no more, she thought with sick fury, remembering how much he'd loved her once.

George would be away—in Sacramento, not La Mesa—until Saturday afternoon. She had five days to patch herself up, meet the "other woman," and decide if her marriage, too, could be patched up. She'd know that as soon as she met Carol James. Liz Ferguson was delighted to act as middlewoman—that was her favorite role. She was an ebullient extrovert who made friends easily and enjoyed being helpful. She liked being "in" on things, maneuvering, rearranging—always, of course, with the best of intentions. She and Carol taught summer classes during the week, Liz said. They would come to meet her at the cove on Saturday.

As long as the weather permitted, Mary swam at the La Jolla cove, sometimes during the week and always on Saturdays. Every

summer Saturday had found her there—and sitting in the same spot—since high school. Her friends knew this and would come, often on purpose, to join her over at the far left, where the high rocky cliff curved down around the edge of the beach to form a smaller cove within the larger one.

If this Saturday habit had started as an affectation, it had gradually become an essential part of her life. That small, secluded niche in the Pacific was the only place where she felt completely at home and free within herself. Sometimes she thought she should have been born with gills.

She had chosen her retreat well. It was a unique and beautiful place—a beach so sheltered by the cliffs on either side that you could swim there, not just fight the surf or ride the waves. She loved it because while it was never the same, it never changed. It could be both frightening and reassuring—wild and dangerous when the tide was high and the winds blew, still and peaceful when the day was calm. Oddly enough, she had never wanted to paint the ocean, although it meant so much in her life. She only liked working with people—and animals.

Long before she was Mary Hitchman, Mary Burns was taught to swim in the cove by one of the lifeguards—to ride the waves, and to dive far down into the clear water around the reef, where goldfish darted in the seaweed and the world was silent. She would float for hours out beyond the rocks, letting the waves rock her gently or tumble her over into the salty spray. She had played there as a child and daydreamed as a young girl. She'd learned to be afraid there, when the tides ran strong and she'd overestimated her own strength, and she'd learned to love George there, lying close to him on the sand, wrestling in the water (now, of course, his "work" took even his weekends). They had made love there one August night when the sand was still warm and the beach completely deserted except for a scattering of stars in the sky and the sensuous rhythm of the waves. On Saturday, Liz would bring Carol James to this place of hers for a swim.

Waiting for Saturday, Mary fought against memory and fear at the beauty parlor and the small expensive shops in Del Mar and La Jolla. She'd never spent much money on herself—now she did so lavishly, enjoying the new experience in spite of her unhappiness. Thank heaven she still had a good figure! She became an instant blonde. She'd always envied blondes, and it made her look years

younger. Her mirror, and the neighbors and friends she ran into, told her so. She had been pretty, but suddenly she was much more than that. The new hairdo and the clothes gave her a sparkle. She'd been too "sweet" before, but pain and a staunch determination to resolve her problems privately and decently gave her something happiness couldn't give—it gave her style. The boys in front of Safeway's whistled at her, and she walked past them with a new spring in her walk, and a new poise.

She reached the cove Saturday morning, ready, she believed, for whatever might happen. She wore an emerald-green bikini and a dark-green, sinfully expensive jacket—she who had worn the same serviceable blue for years—and she noticed, with delight, unmistakable signs of interest as she picked her way among the heavily bronzed males lounging on the hot sand. Perhaps she'd make the same gratifying impression on George, who was flying home that afternoon from Sacramento.

Shortly after noon Liz, burdened down with bathing paraphernalia and an air of importance, and Carol James, looking like all the other girls Mary knew, came across the sand to the end of the beach where Mary sat waiting. Their meeting was casual, and Liz's introduction used first names only. The three of them lounged in the sun, digging their toes into the sand, watching unusually heavy waves batter the rocks out near the reef, and talking idly while Mary studied this stranger who had torn her life into jagged pieces, appropriating George without knowing he was second-hand goods. She hadn't known how much the thought of George making love to this—this child would hurt, but she managed to look relaxed and pleasant.

The girl looked like a teenager. Mary hadn't realized she'd look this young—like all the girls on all the campuses across the land. She was boyishly slim, light and graceful in a modest blue suit which she'd obviously chosen for swimming, not for show. Her hair was a well brushed light brown—again like all the girls on the beach—long and straight and shining, framing an intelligent, happy face.

Mary could find nothing there that wasn't lovely and honest—and she had an artist's eye. If there was anything ugly or cheap there, she'd have seen it. She understood, helplessly, how George could love this radiant girl, how he could want her soft, untouched youth—but she didn't understand how he could lie to her, or seduce her with empty promises, as he must have done. His love for Carol

was imperfect, too, and Mary found an unexpected new pain in this knowledge.

It was a hot day. After almost an hour of desultory conversation—mostly about the charms of Southern California—Carol wanted to swim. It was high tide and the waves were strong, but she assured the other two that she was a good swimmer. Mary didn't want to get her new permanent wet yet, and Liz wanted to talk to Mary. The younger woman piled her hair on top of her head, secured it firmly with a large barrette, and ran into the water, swimming quickly toward the open ocean with strong strokes. Mary had no desire to talk to Liz—or to anyone else—but Liz was doing her a kindness and Mary had always been a proper polite woman. She lay back on her beach towel, closed her eyes against the hot midday sun, and mumbled answers to her friend's persistent questioning. Of course, it helped to look younger and handsomer—the new hairdo had done worlds for her morale. Not that her morale couldn't do with a few more boosts.

No, she didn't want Liz to leave them alone—the last thing she wanted was a private talk with the girl. She knew all she needed to know already and, no, she didn't plan on telling her who she was. She *couldn't*. Carol wasn't at all what she'd expected—so young and serious. Mary had imagined somebody more seductive, a little grasping, somebody she could hate and blame and fight. Not somebody she could hurt.

She'd have it out with George when she got home. Beyond that, she couldn't guess what would happen. Almost, she didn't care! This young, lovely child deserved something better than a middle-aged man turning pompous with success. *That's* what she would tell George! And she was able to laugh when she said it, as Liz did.

Gradually the two women, absorbed by the sun and their immediate thoughts to the exclusion of the rest of the world, realized that something untoward was happening out by the reef—one of the periodic swimming accidents which occur even on the best-guarded beaches. Swimmers insist on swimming too near the rocks where the waves pound relentlessly. Poor swimmers put unwarranted faith in themselves and their fancy goggles and fins and frog suits, and go out much too far. There can be a strong, pulling tide—as there was on that Saturday—and an undertow. Sometimes there are rip-tides beyond the cove's shelter. The guards are alert and quick, and usually the sudden excitement ends happily. But on this afternoon it didn't.

Mary and Liz, standing at the edge of the water, bemused by the sudden turn of events and frightened, watched while the guards rowed back to shore with the body of a young woman, a woman Mary knew, with a stunned, superstitious certainty, would be Carol James. They listened, shocked and silent, to a chorus of voices around them repeating, in conflicting dissonance, what various bystanders thought had happened.

"She drowned—I saw her. A wave hit her smack in the face. She must have swallowed a lot of water. She just went under and drowned. Just like that."

"No, she hit her head on a rock. That's why she went under. I noticed her earlier. She was a good swimmer."

"Maybe she was caught under the reef, and couldn't breathe."

"She must have had a cramp. She just doubled up and sank. I saw her go under, but I was too far away. There was no way I could get to her in time."

"Nobody was near enough."

"Yes, there was! I saw a frogman swimming near her just before the guard shouted."

"That was a shark. I saw it, too, swimming under the surface—right near the place where she went under."

Several people had seen the shark, or the frogman—had seen something—but they were drowned out by the ones who had seen nothing.

"She was alone when the guards reached her. She'd been alone all along, swimming out farther than anybody else. She had seemed to know what she was doing."

"That couldn't have been another swimmer out there—he couldn't just vanish, could he? It must have been a seagull riding on a kelp bed."

"There was a similar drowning last summer, in almost exactly the same spot, remember?"

"I wouldn't swim near there for anything!"

Nobody knew who she was until Liz walked, reluctantly, over to the beached boat and spoke Carol's name softly, her voice uncertain because she was crying. Mary didn't belong there, knew herself to be an ironic intrusion. She spoke soft commiserations, then went quietly away, allowing Liz to look after her friend alone.

But she was loath to go home. It was as though she no longer *had* a home. She was dazed by the sudden tragedy coming so swiftly on the wake of other violent and conflicting emotions, coming as inev-

itably, it seemed to her, as the waves which battered the shore cliffs. She wondered with an unreasonable, hopeless dread what the next wave would be like.

She circled La Jolla, driving her car up and down the curving hills blindly, out of tune with the summer's brilliance. Varicolored tropical plants under tall palms, sharp greens and the rival blues of sky and ocean taunted her bleak, solitary mood. She didn't belong in this sunlit world any more. She didn't belong anywhere. With a frisson of horror, she found herself driving, once again, past the stairs that went down to the cove. Numb, unthinking, she turned her car and took the long way back to San Diego, dawdling in the slow lanes, delaying the inevitable.

What would she tell George? How could she explain how she knew? What could she possibly say to him?

He was home when she arrived—looking frantic.

"What's wrong?" she said. "I'm not late. And you know I always go to the cove on Saturday."

"What have you done to your hair?" he asked, staring at her wildly. "What's that green thing you're wearing? You've never owned a bikini. You don't like bikinis! Where's your blue suit? What have you done to your hair?—My God! *Oh, my God!* I told him you had long brown hair you'd be wearing on top of your head. And a blue suit. I showed him where you always sit—"



Michael Gilbert

Safe!

Miss Sennett ran in panic up the front path. She clattered up the outside steps. The front door was open. Pressing down the switch at the foot of the stairs was an unconscious gesture, but she must have done it, because the dim landing light came on.

The hall was full of the fog.

She ran up the stairs. Her breath was coming in little gasps now. As she reached her landing, the light went out. The gasp became a stifled scream. It took a moment to remember that it was an automatic switch, the frugal sort that always went out before you reached your own flat. She felt for her latch key, got it into the keyhole at the third attempt, opened the door, and tumbled through it. It was only when she was standing inside the sitting room and had bullied her shaking hands into taking off her hat and coat that she began to recover some hold of herself.

"Don't be stupid," she said out loud. "You're not a child. You can't solve it by running away."

Like a full stop to this sentence, the doorbell buzzed.

Her first reaction was a return of panic. Her second was cold common sense.

"Use your brain," she said. "You've learned to do that if you've learned nothing else. Suppose it *is* him. It's no good just keeping the door shut. He knows where you are. He can make trouble."

The bell sounded again.

"And if it isn't him, if it's just a tough out for trouble, better take on there. Mrs. Parmesi is home—her kitchen light was on. She's always complaining about the wireless being too loud. She'll hear quickly enough if you shout."

As she went to the door, the bell sounded for the third time. Not a long, demanding ring. Just a reminder that he was still there.

She opened the door.

"When I follow a girl home," he said, "I always give her a minute or two to make herself tidy."

"What do you want?"

"If you'd listened out there in the street you'd have saved me climbing all these stairs."

"I don't want to talk to you."

"If you don't want to talk," said the man, "no one can make you. But you might as well listen to what I've got to say. It won't take all night."

"If you don't go away, I shall shout. There are people in the other flats—"

"That's all right," said the man genially. "You shout away. I'm not afraid of people."

For a long moment, they looked at each other. Swords crossed, touched, and crossed again.

"Who are you?" said Miss Sennett.

"You know damned well who I am," said the man. "Or you'd have called the police ten minutes ago. I'm told it's quite a family likeness. But we don't want to talk about it all out here—or do we?"

"I—no—" She turned and walked down the passage without another word.

The man smiled again. He came softly in behind her and shut the front door. Then he followed her into the lighted room.

"Now let's be polite. Invite me to sit down. You that side of the fire, me this. Domestic."

"You're Ted's brother," she said at last.

"The late Ted." His teeth showed. They were good teeth, white and strong as Ted's had been once, but a boot had got among them and after that he'd let them go. The more you looked at him, the more you saw the likeness. The hard grey eyes. The mouth which seemed to have no upper lip.

"Yes."

Her voice was cooler. It was under control now. It had been the suddenness which had shocked her. To see the past walk out of the fog and wait for you under the street lamp. It would shake anyone.

"I could use a drink," he said.

She went to the cupboard and took out a bottle of gin.

"Glad you keep up some of your bad habits."

"It's for my friends. I don't drink myself. And it's all I've got. If you want water with it, you can get it from the tap."

The man took the glass, filled it full of gin, and drank it smoothly. Then he filled it again, tipped a little into his mouth, and sat savoring it.

He looked up suddenly and saw her eyeing him. "Don't fuss," he said. "I won't get violent. Gin's mother's milk to me."

"I didn't know Ted had a brother."

"Introduce myself. The name is Les."

"What do you want?"

"A glass of this gin makes a nice start. We can move on to the rest—later."

His eyes rested thoughtfully on her. It was uncanny. He had just that cock of the head that used to tell her that Ted was thinking up something wicked.

"You can say what you want and go away."

"What's the hurry? Ted won't come back. He's safe under three foot of quicklime in the prison yard. Isn't that where they put him? Oh, of course, you wouldn't know. You were inside at the time yourself."

"Listen," said Miss Sennett. "What's past is past. Nothing you can say can bring it back. I don't know why you've waited nearly six years—"

"Seven years with time off for good behavior. Violence. They're very hot on violence."

"I see. Well, that explains why I haven't had the pleasure of seeing you before."

It was wasted on Les. He had planned the interview in advance. There were certain stages at which certain things were going to be said. This happened to be one of them.

"Nice job you've got yourself."

"I—"

"Don't fuss to make anything up. I found where you were working before I came to look you up. Diamond merchants. Hatton Garden. That's right, isn't it? And you're the boss's confidential secretary. The one who brings him his hat and fetches the tea and listens to his secrets and says, 'Yes, Mr. Arkinshaw. No, Mr. Arkinshaw.'"

He tipped a little more gin into his mouth and added: "I've got plenty of friends. They're interested in diamonds."

"No."

"No what?"

"You're not going to interfere with my job."

"Who says I'm not?"

"I do. Try that and I go to the police."

"And tell them what?"

Once again they looked at each other. Once again it was the uncanny resemblance that shook her nerve.

"Don't bluff," he said. "All we want from you is information. Inside information. No one need know about it. If it's the right information,

we move in and clean up. It doesn't hurt anyone except the insurance company. What are you scared of? Losing your job?" He paused. "Or is Mr. Arkinshaw more than a boss to you? One word from me and you lose him and the job, right?"

With terrifying suddenness he was on his feet beside her. "On the other hand—" his fingers just brushed the side of her face "—if you don't do us right, you might lose more than just a job. The prettiest girl goes to the bottom of the class when she's only got one ear."

He walked back to the table, picked up the gin bottle, corked it carefully, and put it in his pocket. Then he was gone.

Miss Sennett sat still for a long time.

"It's an odd setup," agreed Inspector Lugarde. "I don't know when I can remember an odder."

He sat in the armchair in Philip Arkinshaw's office and stared at his own highly polished toe-caps.

"You're sure of your facts?" said Mr. Arkinshaw.

"No doubt at all," said the Inspector. "The past is, as you might say, an open book. It's the future that's problematical."

"She doesn't look like a—what d'you call it?"

"They never do, sir. That's why they're useful. Just imagine you're going in for armed robbery. You're going to hold up a cinema—or a bank—or a post office. If you get caught, the chances are you get caught quick. Something goes wrong with your getaway—the car breaks down, or crashes, and the crowd mobs you. That sort of thing. That's when it's going to make seven years of difference whether you've got a gun on you or not, you see."

"Yes," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "I can see that."

"But if this girl's right on the spot, ready to pick up the gun as soon as you've finished with it, that's tidy help. She's just an ordinary girl, an innocent-looking bystander. She can take the gun away, clean the prints off it, drop it in the river, or post it to the Archbishop of Canterbury. You're clean. That's the point. Even if we get you sixty seconds later, it's going to be the devil of a job to pin armed robbery on you."

"And she did that—she was the redhead in the Ted Tarlo case?"

"That's her. Anna the redhead. You remember it now?"

"Certainly I do," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "Soon after the war, wasn't it? The papers made quite a splash. He came from Liverpool. She was a London girl he picked up. She wasn't very old."

"Seventeen," said the Inspector. "Quite a decent family. Her father

was a solicitor's clerk. War bust the family up and she was on her own. Living in one room."

"And she—er—associated with him?"

"She married him," said the Inspector. "For better or worse. For crooked or straight. Toward the end we had our eyes on her, too, of course. She was searched three times, but we never found a thing. I don't know to this day what she did with the gun—"

Quite suddenly Mr. Arkinshaw laughed. He threw himself back in his chair and abandoned himself to laughter.

"Our Miss Sennett," he gasped at last. "The byword in this office for efficiency, reliability, and respectability. The girl who has never been one minute late in the morning in five years. The best secretary I've ever had."

"Quite," said the Inspector. "And of course we don't know that she's anything but straight now."

"Of course we don't," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "I mean, of course we do. She's as straight as a die. I'd trust her with my last fiver."

"Yes?"

"Maybe I've got a simple mind," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "Of course, I'm not a policeman. But it seems obvious to me. She was only a girl. She may even have had the old-fashioned idea that a wife helps her husband. Then the big bustup came. Instead of just threatening, Ted used his gun. Shot a post-office man, didn't he?"

"That's right."

"Then there was the big trial. She was involved, of course. Ghastly business. He was found guilty and hanged. She got—?"

"Two years."

"A light sentence. Youth and mitigating circumstances. All right. So far as she was concerned, an episode was closed. New leaf. Trained herself. Worked hard. Got a job."

"Yes," said the Inspector.

Mr. Arkinshaw detected the note of reserve. "What do you mean?" he said indignantly. "You can't hound the wretched girl because she made a mistake years ago."

Inspector Lugaarde seemed unmoved by this outburst. "I don't hound people," he said. "I'm a policeman. I've got one job that matters. That is to prevent crime before it happens."

There was a moment of silence that Mr. Arkinshaw did not seem anxious to break.

It was the Inspector who spoke. "How do you imagine," he said, "that we got on to Miss Sennett?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Arkinshaw. He was still troubled. "I suppose you keep an eye on people like that."

"Fssch," said the Inspector. "If we watched everybody who's ever been inside we'd need a sizable police force. No, sir. We were watching somebody, but not Miss Sennett. The name is Les Tarlo. That's right—Ted's younger brother. He came out of prison a month ago. A very dangerous person. I'm not sure that I wouldn't say—" the Inspector considered the matter carefully "—one of the most dangerous young men on our books. And he's got a nice crowd round him. The remains of the Camden Town Barrow Gang. They went into temporary liquidation when we hanged Peter Pasco, and between you and me they're a rotten crowd who'd cut up their nearest and dearest if they saw a five-pound note in it. But if there's one thing they get really excited about, it's diamonds."

"All right," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "But where does it touch—?"

"Miss Sennett? Until last week it didn't. But in the course of the last seven days, Les Tarlo has seen her three times. Possibly four. I think he made contact that night we had the fog. He slipped us then, so I couldn't be sure."

"Yes," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "But what are they after? She doesn't keep the keys of the safe."

"Do you ever carry diamonds about—loose, I mean?"

"Well—yes."

"Often?"

"When I have to." Mr. Arkinshaw felt that a word of explanation was called for. "Real top diamond buyers are few and far between," he said. "I make it my business to find out if they're in London. Then, if I think I've got anything which will interest them, I nip round and see them. They don't come shopping. I've got to go after them. In fact, just as soon as we've finished, I've got a date with a Greek gentleman at the Dorchester. I thought he might like these—"

Mr. Arkinshaw dipped his hand into a fob pocket, fumbled with the concealed opening, and produced a wash-leather bag.

The Inspector examined the contents.

"Ninety thousand?" he suggested.

Mr. Arkinshaw chuckled. "I see you know your stones," he said. Then he became serious again.

"Are you suggesting—?"

"I'm not suggesting anything yet," said the Inspector. "But you can easily work out the angles for yourself. How often do you carry valuable stones? Once a fortnight? Less? All right. If the boys attack

you blind, they're taking a fifteen-to-one chance that they'll find nothing on you. Odds like that don't appeal to them. If they're going to stick their necks out, they like to be on a certainty. But if they had someone who could tip them off—"

"I see," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "Yes. I see."

Miss Sennett sat at her elegant desk in the little room off Philip Arkinshaw's room and did some thinking. She had had to think hard in her life before, but never as hard as she was thinking now.

Certain facts had not escaped her observant eye.

One was that her chief, Philip Arkinshaw, had started taking her into his confidence about his movements. Previously, if he had been going out to see a client, he might have told her or he might not—it was a question of whether the matter happened to crop up. Now it was different. Three times in the last three weeks he had gone out of his way to tell her: "I'm going round to the Savoy this afternoon. I'm taking those stones we had from Roos. You might get me a taxi for four o'clock." And so on.

The first time it happened, she thought it might have been chance. The second, she was not so sure. The third time she was quite certain it wasn't.

That was one thing to think about.

Then there was Les Tarlo. She could keep him in play just so long but no longer.

And there were "the boys," who, she fancied, were pushing Les a little harder than he wanted to go. The Hogan brothers and Minelli, the Maltese. She had met them once and had no desire to meet them again in any circumstances whatsoever.

And there was the unobtrusive-looking gentleman with the military moustache and the derby who had come twice already to see Mr. Arkinshaw. She reflected that if she had been a nice, ordinary girl he might not have meant much to her. As it was, she had placed him with accuracy the first time she saw him.

The buzzer sounded over her desk.

When she went in, Mr. Arkinshaw was standing in front of the fireplace. He was just one shade too casual.

"I'd like you," he said, "to get Lot Eight out of the safe."

"Lot Eight?" Her eyes opened a little. "Have we found a buyer?"

"I don't know yet. There's a man at the Donnington I think may be interested. But he can't see me until this evening."

"That means you'll be keeping them out all night. Or could you put them in the hotel safe?"

"Hotel safe?" said Mr. Arkinshaw. "I've no great faith in the hotel safes, not for packages like Lot Eight. I'll look after them all right. I'm safer than a hotel safe." He smiled his slow smile. "And one other thing—I'd like you to come along."

"Me?" She tried not to sound surprised.

"If we get down to terms, I want a note made of them. They'll be quite complicated. He's buying on a blocked account. And whatever we agree, I want it typed out for signature by both of us there and then."

"All right, Mr. Arkinshaw."

"Sorry to spoil your evening. As compensation I'm awarding you the rest of the afternoon off. No, that's all right, I mean it. You buzz along and get yourself kitted up. We shall have to have drinks with the man and be civil to him. It may develop into an evening. Have you got some sort of—er—cocktail dress, or something like that? Good. I'll meet you at seven o'clock in the foyer. You know the place? Turning off Curzon Street, opposite Shepherd Market."

"Yes."

Whether she was being followed home, she neither knew nor cared. She got home as fast as she could. There was a lot to be thought about. And a lot to be done. First, the telephone—

"It's been a lovely evening," said Miss Sennett. "And thank you again for the dinner."

"I couldn't send you home starving," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "Three glasses of sherry and six little biscuits don't constitute an evening meal for a hard-working girl. Anyway, we had something to celebrate, didn't we?"

"You think he'll buy?"

"He'll have an action for breach of contract if he doesn't," said Mr. Arkinshaw, fingering the paper in his pocket.

"All the same," she said, "I wish he'd taken over the stones this evening."

"Still worried? Wait here while I fetch a taxi."

He walked out into the darkness of Curzon Street, but found that he was being followed. "I think I'll come with you if you don't mind," she said rather breathlessly.

"Okay, bodyguard."

A lone taxi came cruising by and the driver gave them an ex-

ploratory look. "I may be a mug," observed Mr. Arkinshaw, "but not as big a mug as that. We'll have a cab off the rank."

There was only one cab on the rank at the corner, and there was nothing suspicious about it except that it looked so decrepit it was a wonder it held together.

"I'll drop you at your flat and then go on."

"That's rather roundabout," said Miss Sennett, "considering that you live a lot nearer than I do. Why don't we drop you and I'll take the cab on?"

"All right," said Mr. Arkinshaw. He gave the driver his instructions.

"I only hope you've got a good safe at home," she said as they swung out into Piccadilly.

"You've got an obsession about safes," said Mr. Arkinshaw calmly. "Very often they're not safes at all. They're unsafes. People break into my house tonight, they're looking for a very valuable parcel of diamonds—which they happen to know I've brought home with me—"

The taxi was passing a street lamp and the light fell full on him. Miss Sennett took a quick look at him, but his face was unreadable. "Where do they look for them? If they know I've got a safe in my house, their troubles are half over. All they've got to do is bust it open. But if I haven't—well, they've got a lot of searching to do."

"I suppose that's right," said Miss Sennett. "But where *would* you put them?"

The words came out before she had considered their implications and she felt her face going hot.

Mr. Arkinshaw said, without any trace of hesitation: "I should put them in the refrigerator. Empty the icetray, put in more water, drop them in, and refreeze it."

"That certainly seems safe enough," said Miss Sennett. "Unless they get thirsty searching and decide to mix themselves a cool drink. Here we are."

The taxi drew up.

Mr. Arkinshaw got out, had a word with the driver, popped his head in again to say goodnight, then turned and walked up the shallow steps in front of his house. He was feeling in his pocket for a latchkey. Miss Sennett watched him until the front door shut.

The taxi started slowly and grumbled off. As it reached the corner, Miss Sennett was still looking back—frowning. She leaned forward and tapped the glass.

"Stop, please," she said.

The taxi shuddered to a halt and she jumped out. "Do I owe you anything?"

"No, that's all right, Miss. The gentleman fixed it. But he told me to take you to—"

"I've changed my mind," she said. "It's quite all right. Goodnight."

The driver shrugged his shoulders and chugged off. Miss Sennett started to walk back the way she had come.

When she reached Mr. Arkinshaw's house, she stopped again. Her heart was thumping. The house was absolutely dark. That was what had worried her. No lights at all. Nothing through the hall fanlight. Nothing through either of the front windows. Surely when a man goes into his own house, he turns on some sort of light? Unless—

Thump, said her heart. He may have gone straight through to the kitchen at the back. And he's going to think it pretty odd—

She pressed the front doorbell. She could hear it ringing, far away but clear. She waited for a full minute, then pressed the bell again. He must have heard it.

She seized the heavy bronze knocker, raised it, and beat it down. Once, twice.

The door opened silently, inward. An arm came out, caught her, and pulled her through. She was dragged, not gently, down the dark hall, where a chink of light showed. A door was opened, she was pushed in, and it snapped shut behind her.

It was a small, book-lined study. The one window was heavily curtained, and further blocked by a blanket which had been pinned over it. The only light came from a table light in the corner.

Mr. Arkinshaw sat on the edge of the table. His coat had been torn open and he looked disheveled, but still cheerful.

There were three other men in the room—Tarlo, the elder Hogan, and Minelli. The young Hogan was the driver. He would be outside somewhere in the car.

"So you've come back to see the fun," said Mr. Arkinshaw, looking at her, his head on one side.

"I didn't—"

"You keep quiet," said Tarlo. "Run her over, too." It was the Maltese who searched her. He did it very thoroughly and she saw Mr. Arkinshaw's mouth tightening and hoped he wasn't going to spoil things.

"She's clean," said Minelli.

"All right. Go over there and sit beside him. That's right. Make

yourself comfortable. Now then, there's something we want, and one of you's got it, or knows where it is. Either you've put it somewhere or it's hidden on you, in one of those clever pockets. We've got all night to find it—but the easiest way would be for you to tell us where it is. Easiest for you, I mean." Tarlo's eye seemed to rest thoughtfully, for a moment, on the electric fire glowing dark red in the hearth.

Miss Sennett was shaking. Or seemed to be. Her whole body was jerking.

"You're wasting your time," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "I know what you want, but it isn't here. I left it in the safe at the Donnington Hotel."

"That's a lie," said Hogan. "I had my eye on them all the time. Let's get started on him. Or maybe if we roughed her up a bit he'd change his tune."

Miss Sennett had turned almost sideways. She was more than touching Mr. Arkinshaw now. She was pressed against him. He sat with one hand behind him on the table to steady himself, and at this moment he felt something cold and heavy slide across the back of his knuckles and come to rest half on his hand, half on the table.

Without moving his body, he shifted his fingers until they were curled round it.

"I reckon we can make him sing," agreed Tarlo.

"Somehow," said Mr. Arkinshaw, "I doubt it."

It was the note of confidence in his voice that made them all look up.

"Ten seconds ago I might have believed you. Not now."

He brought his right hand from behind his back and the three men saw what was in it. They had nothing to say.

"I warn you," went on Philip Arkinshaw, "I'm not one of your crack shots, so I always aim for the middle of the stomach. Then I'm bound to hit something. That's right. Quite still, please. There's a telephone in the hall, Miss Sennett."

Sometime afterward, Miss Sennett said: "You were taking an awful risk. Suppose I hadn't turned up?"

"I wasn't risking the diamonds, anyway," said Arkinshaw.

"You weren't—"

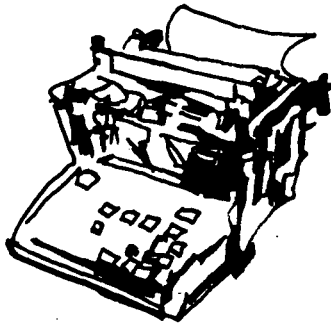
"I slipped them to the head waiter halfway through dinner. They were in the night safe in a Piccadilly bank before we'd finished our

coffee. Now perhaps you can tell *me* something. I saw Minelli search you. Why didn't he find the gun?"

"That lout," said Miss Sennett contemptuously. "Why, in my day I've had a police searcher who knew her job run me over and miss a full-sized thirty-eight. What chance d'you think an amateur would have?"

"No doubt about it," said Mr. Arkinshaw. "You are the perfect secretary." It was hard to say whether he was smiling or not. "Finish your drink and I'll see if I can find a taxi for you. By the way, I expect you'll want a sleep-in after all this. I'll warn them at the office not to expect you till lunchtime."

"Really, Mr. Arkinshaw, that will be quite unnecessary," said Miss Sennett.



John O'Hara

How I Am Now in Chi

Pal Ted:

Well, pally, I have come to the conclusion that old pals are best and never put too much faith in new acquaintances or you will end up two away from the 9 ball. When I tell you that you are getting it straight from head-quarters, because I know. I have been thinking it over and the true test of friendship is if you can weather such things as for instance you and I, meaning like differences of opinion over a mouse or the dough department and things on that order. You and I certainly have had our differences of opinion over the above yet here I am when I think it over and give the matter mature consideration I think of you as a friend and I always hope you will consider me a friend if you have the ill fortune of ever getting in a spot in which I found myself recently. Then you can count on me altho' hoping the occasion does not arise. (God forbid.)

Well I recall telling you about a little mouse one of the local 400 that her father was president of the bank (largest in town). This mouse Jean by name use to come every night to the hotel to hear me sing and it got so it was embarrassing owing to the fact that those lugs in the band would begin to kid me about it. They would say that mouse has got it for Joey but bad. She would come there and sit and just look at me and when she would get up to dance and I would sing and she would just stand there in front of me with her escort and it became so that it was obvious and altho I pride myself on being equal to such situations (having had the experience before) it use to disconcert me more than I can say.

However she arranged an introduction and I use to take her out especially when I was singing at private parties of the local 400. In a short time she use to stop for me at the hotel damn near every evening and I came to care for her as she was different than the usual ones that make a fool of themselves over a singer or entertainer. We were reaching the stage where it was you might say only a question of time before Joey and Jean would veil up and perhaps I would consider giving up this life. Not that I ever intended doing that but she use to discuss it with me. She often use to ask me if I thought my life interesting and was it fun and how did I happen to

get in it and of course that was her subtle way of getting me to consider probably going into the banking game with her father after we got married.

Well of course she was nineteen years old and one for the books as far as looks, figure, personality is concerned and also had plenty of scratch, being the bank presidents daughter. I went to work and bought a couple new arrangements in fact she gave me one for Xmas last Xmas. I happen to say one night I needed a couple new arrangements and she asked me how much they were and I told her my guy charged \$50.

She also gave me a set of studs and cuff links to wear with my tails that must have set her back the price of four arrangements. It was her favorite song at the time, the arrangement she gave me. It was You go to my Head. I had an old arrangement of it from last summer but never had any call for it but she use to like it before she met me and so I got out the old arrangement and of course did not spoil it for her by saying it was one I had last summer and never had any call for. However I used the 50 to give her a Xmas present, a sport watch.

Then around the end of January they were having this ball in honor of the President (Roosevelt) to get up a fund that they would give for this infantile paralasys. Very white of them as they sit around all year and say what a heel he is and on his birthday they give him this ball and it is a club called the Junior League that she belonged to had charge of getting the talent and all that like publicity etc. So of course I gladly donated my services as I was going anyway having planned to escort Jean to the ball.

The ball was in the ballroom of the hotel but I was going to escort her from her house. Then at the very last minute I said to her what should we do that evening until it was time to go to the ball (11.30 or 12) and she said she was going to a dinner party at these friends of hers named Fenton. I said it was a fine time to tell me that and said I consider it a fine thing to go to the Fenton's for dinner knowing that they were one of the few that took a snobbish attitude in connection with me. I told her she could take it or leave it and if she went to their house for dinner she could count me out on the subject of escorting her to the ball.

I was plenty burned and she said she never understood I was taking her anyway and of course she was right. I took it for granted and didnt bother to ask her until the last minute and then I said well I will just stop for you at the Fenton's about 11.30 and that will

save you the trouble of coming to the ball alone or with another couple. Imagine my surprise to learn that she already had an escort, Jerry Towle a young dope that does nothing but fly his own plane and scaring farmer's horses and always in some kind of a jam with the law but his old man has plenty of scratch and gets him out of it. I said you go with Towle and let him take you every other place from now on and dont bother to come to the hotel any more but stay away and our date for the next night was off.

Well we had a quarrel about that and it ended up I didnt go to the Fenton's and when I was singing that night at the ball she made Towle dance her up and request Go to my Head but I said very politely I only had the newer numbers and did not sing Go to my Head this year. Did she burn? I didnt even dance with her and I only sat with the boys in the band all night and then went up to my room after I did my numbers and called up some hustler and took her to a hamburger joint where the 400 go every night after dances and hoped Jean and Towle would come in but they never did so I gave the hustler 5 bucks for her time and sent her home in a taxi.

Well the next night I am singing and in she comes but I never give a tumble but she gets her load on I notice and about one a.m. a note comes over by waiter and she wants me to meet her but she is with this party and I am burned so I dont answer the note. I just tell the waiter no reply and when I finish my last number I screw and go around the corner to have a cup of coffee and there she is, followed me.

I do not want to make a scene then and there and she has her load on and will not go back and rejoin her party so I send around and get my car out of the garage hoping to take her for a ride and sober her up but oh no. Instead we go for a ride and altho' it was freezing and we did not have a coat either of us we are out for about an hour and always fighting and it began to get late and I knew the grill at the hotel would be putting the chairs up on the tables so I ignored her and turned around and went back.

No sign of her party. They have gone. That means I have to take her home and she lives out in the suburbs and by the time we get there somebody has called her up to see if she got home and woke up the old man and he is waiting for her in a dressing gown. She is still plastered the little lush and her old man asks what the meaning of this is and who am I and bringing his daughter home in this condition. Then I tell him who I am and he says Oh, he has heard about me and has always wanted to meet me and without any

warning brings one up from the floor and I stop it with my chin, as dirty a punch as I ever saw. I got up but had the presence of mind so that I did not let him have one but said I dont want any part of his daughter, the lush. Keep her home or he would be a grandfather one of these days without a son in law. I think he would have got a gun but I was out of there before he had the chance.

Well the next a.m. about 10 the phone rings and it is the manager, my boss. He wants me down in his office so I go and he hears all about it only an exaggeration of what really happened. To make a long story short I am out. I say what about my contract and he says read your contract and then I remember he had the right to fire me if I get out of line and he gives me the rest of the week (pay) and an extra week and says he advised me to lam out of there as I insulted the most powerful man in the whole town as I will soon find out.

I find out alright. I call up this ad agency that pays me for singing on the local radio station where my sponsor is this credit jewelry company. They were just about to call me. I am out. The mouse's old man only owns the God damn station. I go to a lawyer but he wont take my case as he says I havent any case. Even if I had he would think twice about bucking this mouse's old man.

So there I am holding an empty bag with my wardrobe and a car only about half paid for and all told about a little over 300 in my kick. So I go back to the hotel and start in packing (about 5 in the afternoon this is) and a messenger comes and brings me a note from Jean. She is sorry about it and did not want to cause me all this trouble and would do anything to make or mend. Her old man had her at the doctor's or she would have got in touch with me sooner and will I call her at this number, a girl friend of hers. They are going to take her to some place in N. Carolina the next day and she has to see me. I do not have to worry as the dr. says she is okay, but she would not be able to stand it going away like this with me feeling this way all over a little thing like a misunderstanding over the Fenton's dinner and she heard her old man who was the most powerful man in town as far as his own family are concerned. All I had to do was pick up Jean and drive over the state line and inside of two hours he would have a son in law alright. I am sitting there debating within myself as to whether I will call her or not and the door opens. "You know me," he says. Towle. "I see you are packing. Good. There is a 9 oclock for Chicago and an 8.30 for N.Y. and I

would suggest the 8.30 but I leave the choice entirely up to you," he says. "I think I will sit around and take you to the train."

I ignore him but go on packing and when I finish up I send down and have room service bring me up a steak sandwich with French fries, a cup of coffee and a piece of pie and I eat it there with him sitting there. I had to pay cash for it as room service will not let me sign. Then I lit a butt and smoke it calmly and then I phone the railroad and order a lower on the 9 oclock for Chi. I can see he is burned that that is what I intend. Then the phone rings and he answers it and says he is not here but has just left and then he says "Dont be a damn fool Jean this is Jerry and yes he is here but you are not going to see him if I can help it and you may not speak to him as I am acting on your fathers orders." Then he hangs up. He is a big lug. Over 200.

Well I phone the garage and tell them to put my car into dead storage and take out the battery and then it is time to go to the train and he goes with me. When we get there I tell him he can have the pleasure of paying the taxi and he says it is a pleasure alright and I said I thought it would be and also a pleasure for me. When I go to get my ticket he even pays for the ticket, tips the porter, etc.

I did not lose my sense of humor. I said "By the way I have nothing to read on the train" and he buys me papers and magazines. I see the humor in it and I also say I always have chewing-gum on trains so he buys me some gum. But he does not see the humor for when the train is ready to pull out I reach out my hand and say it was a pleasure to have him come down and see me off, him of all people and just then he hauls off and slaps my hand, burned like I never saw anybody burned.

Well the train pulled out and that is the story of how I am now in Chi. I am singing for coffee & cakes at a crib on Cottage Grove Ave. here. It isnt much of a spot but they say it is lucky as four or five singers and musicians who worked here went from here to big things and I am hoping. Well give my best to Artie and Fred and Chink and Mort. Tell Mort congratulats as I hear he is starting up a new band and I would be willing to work for scale. Tell Fred when he comes out to look me up as I plug his last two numbers every nite. Well Ted all the best and I don't have to say I think your solo in Jeepers Creepers is as good as Vanuti. I am glad a pal is having such good luck and I mean that sincerely as ever. Will write soon again.

Pal Joey

The Lodger

“There he is at last, and I’m glad of it, Ellen. ’Taint a night you would wish a dog to be out in.”

Mr. Bunting’s voice was full of unmistakable relief. He was close to the fire, sitting back in a deep leather armchair—a clean-shaven, dapper man, still in outward appearance what he had been so long and now no longer was—a self-respecting butler.

“You needn’t feel so nervous about him—Mr. Sleuth can look out for himself, all right.” Mrs. Bunting spoke in a dry, rather tart tone. She was less emotional, better balanced, than was her husband. On her the marks of past servitude were less apparent, but they were there all the same—especially in her neat black stuff dress and scrupulously clean, plain collar and cuffs. Mrs. Bunting, as a single woman, had been for long years what is known as a useful maid.

“I can’t think why he wants to go out in such weather. He did it in last week’s fog, too,” Bunting went on complainingly.

“Well, it’s none of your business, now, is it?”

“No—that’s true enough. Still, ’twould be a very bad thing for us if anything happened to him. This lodger’s the first bit of luck we’ve had for a very long time.”

Mrs. Bunting made no answer to this remark. It was too obviously true to be worth answering. Also, she was listening—following in her imagination—her lodger’s quick, singularly quiet—“stealthy,” she called it to herself—progress through the dark, fog-filled hall and up the staircase.

“It isn’t safe for decent folk to be out in such weather—not unless they have something to do that won’t wait till tomorrow.” Bunting had at last turned round. He was now looking straight into his wife’s narrow, colorless face. He was an obstinate man and liked to prove himself right. “I read you out the accidents in *Lloyd’s* yesterday—shocking, they were, and all brought about by the fog! And then, that ’orrid monster at his work again—”

“Monster?” repeated Mrs. Bunting absently. She was trying to hear the lodger’s footsteps overhead, but her husband went on as if there had been no interruption.

"It wouldn't be very pleasant to run up against such a party as that in the fog, eh?"

"What stuff you do talk!" she said sharply—and then she got up suddenly. Her husband's remark had disturbed her. She hated to think of such things as the terrible series of murders that were just then horrifying and exciting the nether world of London. Though she enjoyed pathos and sentiment—Mrs. Bunting would listen with mild amusement to the details of a breach-of-promise action—she shrank from stories of immorality or physical violence.

Mrs. Bunting got up from the straight-backed chair on which she had been sitting. It would soon be time for supper.

She moved about the sitting room, flecking off an imperceptible touch of dust here, straightening a piece of furniture there. Bunting looked around once or twice. He would have liked to ask Ellen to leave off fidgeting, but he was mild and fond of peace, so he refrained. However, she soon gave over what irritated him of her own accord.

But even then Mrs. Bunting did not at once go down to the cold kitchen, where everything was in readiness for her simple cooking. Instead she opened the door leading into the bedroom behind, and there, closing the door quietly, stepped back into the darkness and stood motionless, listening.

At first she heard nothing, but gradually there came the sound of someone moving about in the room just overhead. Try as she might, however, it was impossible for her to guess what her lodger was doing. At last she heard him open the door leading out on the landing. That meant that he would spend the rest of the evening in the rather cheerless room above the drawing-room floor. Oddly enough, he liked sitting there best, though the only warmth obtainable was from a gas stove fed by a shilling-in-the-slot arrangement.

It was indeed true that Mr. Sleuth had brought the Buntings luck, for at the time he had taken their rooms it had been touch-and-go with them.

After having each separately led the sheltered, impersonal, and, above all, financially easy existence that is the compensation life offers those men and women who deliberately take upon themselves the yoke of domestic service, these two, butler and useful maid, had suddenly, in middle age, determined to join their fortunes and savings. Bunting was a widower. He had one pretty daughter, a girl of seventeen, who now lived, as had been the case ever since the death of her mother, with a prosperous aunt. His second wife had been

reared in the Foundling Hospital, but she had gradually worked her way up into the higher ranks of the servant class and as useful maid she had saved quite a tidy sum of money.

Unluckily, misfortune had dogged Mr. and Mrs. Bunting from the very first. The seaside place where they had begun by taking a lodging house became the scene of an epidemic. Then had followed a business experiment which had proved disastrous. But before going back into service, either together or separately, they had made up their minds to make one last effort, and, with the little money that remained to them, they had taken over the lease of a small house in the Marylebone Road.

Bunting, whose appearance was very good, had retained a connection with old employers and their friends, so he occasionally got a good job as waiter. During this last month, his jobs had perceptibly increased in number and in profit. Mrs. Bunting was not superstitious, but it seemed that in this matter, as in everything else, Mr. Sleuth, their new lodger, had brought them luck.

As she stood there, still listening intently in the darkness of the bedroom, she told herself not for the first time what Mr. Sleuth's departure would mean to her and Bunting. It would almost certainly mean ruin.

Luckily, the lodger seemed entirely pleased both with the rooms and with his landlady. There was really no reason why he should ever leave such nice lodgings. Mrs. Bunting shook off her vague sense of apprehension and unease. She turned round, took a step forward, and, feeling for the handle of the door giving into the passage, she opened it and went down with light, firm steps into the kitchen.

She lit the gas and put a frying pan on the stove, and then once more her mind reverted, as if in spite of herself, to her lodger, and there came back to Mrs. Bunting very vividly the memory of all that had happened the day Mr. Sleuth had taken her rooms.

The date of this excellent lodger's coming had been the twenty-ninth of December, and the time late afternoon. She and Bunting had been sitting, gloomily enough, over their small banked-up fire. They had dined in the middle of the day—he on a couple of sausages, she on a little cold ham. They were utterly out of heart, each trying to pluck up courage to tell the other that it was no use trying any more.

The two had also had a little tiff on that dreary afternoon. A

newspaper seller had come yelling down the Marylebone Road, shouting out, " 'Orrible murder in Whitechapel!" and just because Bunting had an old uncle living in the East End he had gone and bought a paper, and at a time, too, when every penny, nay, every halfpenny, had its full value. Mrs. Bunting remembered the circumstances because that murder in Whitechapel had been the first of these terrible crimes—there had been four since—which she would never allow Bunting to discuss in her presence, and yet which had of late begun to interest curiously, uncomfortably, even her refined mind.

But, to return to the lodger. It was then, on that dreary afternoon, that suddenly there had come to the front door a tremulous, uncertain double knock.

Bunting ought to have got up, but he had gone on reading the paper and so Mrs. Bunting, with the woman's greater courage, had gone out into the passage, turned up the gas, and opened the door to see who it could be. She remembered, as if it were yesterday instead of nigh on a month ago, Mr. Sleuth's peculiar appearance. Tall, dark, lanky, an old-fashioned top hat concealing his high bald forehead, he had stood there, an odd figure of a man, blinking at her.

"I believe—is it not a fact that you let lodgings?" he had asked in a hesitating, whistling voice, a voice that she had known in a moment to be that of an educated man, of a gentleman. As he had stepped into the hall, she had noticed that in his right hand he held a narrow bag—a quite new bag of strong brown leather.

Everything had been settled in less than a quarter of an hour. Mr. Sleuth had at once "taken" to the drawing-room floor, and then, as Mrs. Bunting eagerly lit the gas in the front room above, he had looked around him and said, rubbing his hands with a nervous movement, "Capital—capital! This is just what I've been looking for!"

The sink had specially pleased him—the sink and the gas stove. "This is quite first-rate," he had exclaimed, "for I make all sorts of experiments! I am, you must understand, Mrs.—er—Bunting, a man of science." Then he had sat down suddenly. "I'm very tired," he had said in a low tone, "very tired indeed. I have been walking about all day."

From the very first, the lodger's manner had been odd, sometimes distant and abrupt, and then, for no reason at all that she could see, confidential and plaintively confiding. But Mrs. Bunting was aware that eccentricity has always been a perquisite, as it were the special

luxury, of the well born and well educated. Scholars and suchlike were never quite like other people.

And then this particular gentleman had proved himself so eminently satisfactory as to the one thing that really matters to those who let lodgings. "My name is Sleuth," he said, "S-l-e-u-t-h. Think of a hound, Mrs. Bunting, and you'll never forget my name. I could give you references," he had added, giving her, as she now remembered, a funny sidewise look, "but I prefer to dispense with them. How much did you say? Twenty-three shillings a week, with attendance? Yes, that will suit me perfectly, and I'll begin by paying my first month's rent in advance. Now, four times twenty-three shillings is"—he looked at Mrs. Bunting and for the first time he smiled, a queer, wry smile—"ninety-two shillings."

He had taken a handful of sovereigns out of his pocket and put them down on the table. "Look here," he had said, "there's five pounds—and you can keep the change, for I shall want you to do a little shopping for me tomorrow."

After he had been in the house about an hour, the bell had rung, and the new lodger had asked Mrs. Bunting if she could oblige him with the loan of a Bible. She brought up to him her best Bible, the one that had been given to her as a wedding present by a lady with whose mother she had lived for several years. This Bible and one other book, of which the odd name was *Cruden's Concordance*, formed Mr. Sleuth's only reading. He spent hours each day poring over the Old Testament and over the volume which Mrs. Bunting had at last decided to be a queer kind of index to the Book.

However, to return to the lodger's first arrival. He had had no luggage with him, barring the small brown bag, but very soon parcels had begun to arrive addressed to Mr. Sleuth, and it was then that Mrs. Bunting first became curious. These parcels were full of clothes, but it was quite clear to the landlady's feminine eye that none of these clothes had been made for Mr. Sleuth. They were, in fact, secondhand clothes, bought at good secondhand places, each marked, when marked at all, with a different name. And the really extraordinary thing was that occasionally a complete suit disappeared—became, as it were, obliterated from the lodger's wardrobe.

As for the bag he had brought with him, Mrs. Bunting had never caught sight of it again. And this also was certainly very strange.

Mrs. Bunting thought a great deal about that bag. She often wondered what had been in it—not a nightshirt and comb and brush, as she had at first supposed, for Mr. Sleuth had asked her to go out

and buy him a brush and comb and toothbrush the morning after his arrival. That fact was specially impressed on her memory, for at the little shop, a barber's, where she had purchased the brush and comb, the foreigner who had served her had insisted on telling her some of the horrible details of the murder that had taken place the day before in Whitechapel, and it had upset her very much.

As to where the bag was now, it was probably locked up in the lower part of a chiffonier in the front sitting room. Mr. Sleuth evidently always carried the key of the little cupboard on his person, for Mrs. Bunting, though she looked well for it, had never been able to find it.

And yet never was there a more confiding or trusting gentleman. The first four days that he had been with them he had allowed his money—the considerable sum of one hundred and eighty-four pounds in gold—to lie about wrapped up in pieces of paper on his dressing table. This was a very foolish, indeed a wrong thing to do, as she had allowed herself respectfully to point out to him, but as only answer he had laughed, a loud, discordant shout of laughter.

Mr. Sleuth had many other odd ways, but Mrs. Bunting, a true woman in spite of her prim manner and love of order, had an infinite patience with masculine vagaries.

On the first morning of Mr. Sleuth's stay in the Buntings' house, while Mrs. Bunting was out buying things for him, the new lodger had turned most of the pictures and photographs hanging in his sitting room with their faces to the wall. But this queer action on Mr. Sleuth's part had not surprised Mrs. Bunting as much as it might have done. It recalled an incident of her long-past youth—something that had happened a matter of twenty years ago, at a time when Mrs. Bunting, then the still youthful Ellen Cottrell, had been maid to an old lady. The old lady had a favorite nephew, a bright, jolly young gentleman who had been learning to paint animals in Paris, and it was he who had had the impudence, early one summer morning, to turn to the wall six beautiful engravings of paintings done by the famous Mr. Landseer! The old lady thought the world of those pictures, but her nephew, as his only excuse for the extraordinary thing he had done, had observed that "they put his eye out."

Mr. Sleuth's excuse had been much the same, for when Mrs. Bunting had come into his sitting room and found all her pictures, or at any rate all those of her pictures that happened to be portraits

of ladies, with their faces to the wall, he had offered as his only explanation, "Those women's eyes follow me about."

Mrs. Bunting had gradually become aware that Mr. Sleuth had a fear and dislike of women. When she was "doing" the staircase and landing, she often heard him reading bits of the Bible aloud to himself, and in the majority of instances the texts he chose contained uncomplimentary reference to her own sex. Only today she had stopped and listened while he uttered threateningly the awful words, "A strange woman is a narrow pit. She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men." There had been a pause, and then had come, in a high singsong, "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." It had made Mrs. Bunting feel quite queer.

The lodger's daily habits were also peculiar. He stayed in bed all the morning and sometimes part of the afternoon, and he never went out before the streetlamps were alight. Then there was his dislike of an open fire—he generally sat in the top front room, and while there he always used the large gas stove, not only for his experiments, which he carried on at night, but also in the daytime, for warmth.

But there! Where was the use of worrying about the lodger's funny ways? Of course Mr. Sleuth was eccentric. If he hadn't been, "just a leetle 'touched' upstairs," as Bunting had once described it, he wouldn't be their lodger now—he would be living in a quite different sort of way with some of his relations, or with a friend of his own class.

Mrs. Bunting, while these thoughts galloped disconnectedly through her brain, went on with her cooking, doing everything with a certain delicate and cleanly precision.

While in the middle of making the toast on which was to be poured some melted cheese, she suddenly heard a noise, or rather a series of noises. Shuffling, hesitating steps were creaking down the house above. She looked up and listened. Surely Mr. Sleuth was not going out again into the cold, foggy night? But no—for the sounds did not continue down the passage leading to the front door.

The heavy steps were coming slowly down the kitchen stairs. Nearer and nearer came the thudding sounds, and Mrs. Bunting's heart began to beat as if in response. She put out the gas stove, unheeding of the fact that the cheese would stiffen and spoil in the cold air, and turned and faced the door. There was a fumbling at

the handle, and a moment later the door opened and revealed, as she had known it would, her lodger.

Mr. Sleuth was clad in a plain dressing gown and in his hand was a candle. When he saw the lit-up kitchen and the woman standing in it, he looked inexplicably taken aback, almost aghast.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you, sir? I hope you didn't ring, sir." Mrs. Bunting did not come forward to meet her lodger—instead, she held her ground in front of the stove. Mr. Sleuth had no business to come down like this into her kitchen.

"No, I—I didn't ring," he stammered. "I didn't know you were down here, Mrs. Bunting. Please excuse my costume. The truth is, my gas stove has gone wrong, or rather that shilling-in-the-slot arrangement has done so. I came down to see if *you* had a gas stove. I am going to ask leave to use it tonight for an experiment I want to make."

Mrs. Bunting felt troubled—oddly, unnaturally troubled. Why couldn't the lodger's experiment wait till tomorrow? "Oh, certainly sir, but you will find it very cold down here." She looked round her dubiously.

"It seems most pleasantly warm," he observed, "warm and cozy after my cold room upstairs."

"Won't you let me make you a fire?" Mrs. Bunting's housewifely instincts were roused. "Do let me make you a fire in your bedroom, sir—you ought to have one there these cold nights."

"By no means—I mean, I would prefer not. I do not like an open fire, Mrs. Bunting." He frowned, and still stood, a strange-looking figure, just inside the kitchen door.

"Do you want to use this stove now, sir? Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"No, not now, thank you all the same, Mrs. Bunting. I shall come down later, altogether later—probably after you and your husband have gone to bed. But I should be much obliged if you would see that the gas people come tomorrow and put my stove in order."

"Perhaps Bunting could put it right for you, sir. I'll ask him to go up."

"No, no—I don't want anything of that sort done tonight. Besides, he couldn't put it right. The cause of the trouble is quite simple. The machine is choked up with shillings. A foolish plan, so I have always felt it to be."

Mr. Sleuth spoke very pettishly, with far more heat than he was wont to speak, but Mrs. Bunting sympathized with him. She had

always suspected those slot-machines to be as dishonest as if they were human. It was dreadful the way they swallowed up the shillings!

As if he were divining her thoughts, Mr. Sleuth, walking forward, stared up at the kitchen slot-machine. "Is it nearly full?" he asked abruptly. "I expect my experiment will take some time, Mrs. Bunting."

"Oh, no, sir, there's plenty of room for shillings there still. We don't use our stove as much as you do yours, sir. I'm never in the kitchen a minute longer than I can help this cold weather."

And then, with him preceding her, Mrs. Bunting and her lodger made a slow progress to the ground floor. There Mr. Sleuth courteously bade his landlady good night and proceeded upstairs to his own apartments.

Mrs. Bunting again went down into her kitchen, again she lit the stove, and again she cooked the toasted cheese. But she felt unnerved, afraid of she knew not what. The place seemed to her alive with alien presences, and once she caught herself listening, which was absurd, for of course she could not hope to hear what her lodger was doing two, if not three flights upstairs. She had never been able to discover what Mr. Sleuth's experiments really were—all she knew was that they required a very high degree of heat.

The Buntings went to bed early that night. But Mrs. Bunting intended to stay awake. She wanted to know at what hour of the night her lodger would come down into the kitchen, and above all she was anxious as to how long he would stay there. But she had had a long day and presently she fell asleep.

The church clock hard by struck two in the morning, and suddenly Mrs. Bunting awoke. She felt sharply annoyed with herself. How could she have dropped off like that? Mr. Sleuth must have been down and up again hours ago.

Then, gradually, she became aware of a faint acrid odor—elusive, almost intangible, it yet seemed to encompass her and the snoring man by her side almost as a vapor might have done.

Mrs. Bunting sat up in bed and sniffed, and then, in spite of the cold, she quietly crept out of the nice, warm bedclothes and crawled along to the bottom of the bed. There Mr. Sleuth's landlady did a very curious thing—she leaned over the brass rail and put her face close to the hinge of the door. Yes, it was from there that this strange, horrible odor was coming—the smell must be very strong in the

passage. Mrs. Bunting thought she knew now what became of those suits of clothes of Mr. Sleuth's that disappeared.

As she crept back, shivering, under the bedclothes, she longed to give her sleeping husband a good shake, and in fancy she heard herself saying, "Bunting, get up! There's something strange going on downstairs that we ought to know about!"

But Mr. Sleuth's landlady, as she lay by her husband's side listening with painful intentness, knew very well that she would do nothing of the sort. The lodger had a right to destroy his clothes by burning if the fancy took him. What if he did make a certain amount of mess, a certain amount of smell, in her nice kitchen? Was he not—was he not a good lodger? If they did anything to upset him, where could they ever hope to get another like him?

Three o'clock struck before Mrs. Bunting heard slow, heavy steps creaking up her kitchen stairs. But Mr. Sleuth did not go straight up to his own quarters, as she expected him to do. Instead, he went to the front door and, opening it, put it on the chain. At the end of ten minutes or so he closed the front door, and by that time Mrs. Bunting had divined why the lodger had behaved in this strange fashion—it must have been to get the strong acrid smell of burning wool out of the passage. But Mrs. Bunting felt as if she herself would never get rid of the horrible odor. She felt herself to be all smell.

At last the unhappy woman fell into a deep, troubled sleep—and then she dreamed a most terrible and unnatural dream. Hoarse voices seemed to be shouting in her ear, "'Orrible murder off the Edgeware Road!" Then three words, indistinctly uttered, followed by—"at his work again! Awful details!"

Even in her dream, Mrs. Bunting felt angered and impatient. She knew well why she was being disturbed by this horrid nightmare. It was because of Bunting—Bunting, who insisted on talking to her of those frightful murders, in which only morbid, vulgar-minded people took any interest. Why, even now in her dream, she could hear her husband speaking to her about it.

"Ellen"—so she heard Bunting say in her ear—"Ellen, my dear, I'm just going to get up to get a paper. It's after seven o'clock."

Mrs. Bunting sat up in bed. The shouting—nay, worse, the sound of tramping, hurrying feet smote on her ears. It had been no nightmare, then, but something infinitely worse—reality. Why couldn't Bunting have lain quietly in bed a while longer and let his poor wife go on dreaming? The most awful dream would have been easier to bear than this awakening.

She heard her husband go to the front door and, as he bought the paper, exchange a few excited words with the newspaper boy. Then he came back and began silently moving about the room.

"Well?" she cried. "Why don't you tell me about it?"

"I thought you'd rather not hear."

"Of course I like to know what happens close to our own front door!" she snapped.

And then he read out a piece of the newspaper—only a few lines, after all—telling in brief, unemotional language that the body of a woman, apparently done to death in a peculiarly atrocious fashion some hours before, had been found in a passage leading to a disused warehouse off the Marylebone Road.

"It serves that sort of hussy right!" was Mrs. Bunting's only comment.

When Mrs. Bunting went down into the kitchen, everything there looked just as she had left it, and there was no trace of the acrid smell she had expected to find there. Instead, the cavernous white-washed room was full of fog and she noticed that, though the shutters were bolted and barred as she had left them, the windows behind them had been widely opened to the air. She, of course, had left them shut.

She stooped and flung open the oven door of her gas-stove. Yes, it was as she had expected. A fierce heat had been generated there since she had last used the oven, and a mass of black, gluey soot had fallen through to the stone floor below.

Mrs. Bunting took the ham and eggs that she had bought the previous day for her own and Bunting's breakfast and cooked them over the gas ring in their sitting room. Her husband watched her in surprised silence. She had never done such a thing before.

"I couldn't stay down there," she said, "it was so cold and foggy. I thought I'd make breakfast up here, just for today."

"Yes," he said kindly, "that's quite right, Ellen. I think you've done quite right, my dear."

But when it came to the point, his wife could not eat any of the nice breakfast she had got ready, she only had another cup of tea. "Are you ill?" Bunting asked solicitously.

"No," she said shortly, "of course I'm not ill. Don't be silly—the thought of that horrible thing happening so close by has upset me. Just hark to them, now!"

Through their closed windows penetrated the sound of scurrying

feet and loud, ribald laughter. A crowd—nay, a mob—hastened to and from the scene of the murder.

Mrs. Bunting made her husband lock the front gate. "I don't want any of those ghouls in here!" she exclaimed angrily. And then, "What a lot of idle people there must be in the world," she said.

The coming and going went on all day. Mrs. Bunting stayed indoors. Bunting went out. After all, the ex-butler was human—it was natural that he should feel thrilled and excited. All their neighbors were the same. His wife wasn't reasonable about such things. She quarreled with him when he didn't tell her anything, and yet he was sure she would have been angry with him if he had said very much about it.

The lodger's bell rang about two o'clock, and Mrs. Bunting prepared the simple luncheon that was also his breakfast. As she rested the tray a minute on the drawing-room-floor landing, she heard Mr. Sleuth's high, quavering voice reading aloud the words: "She saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell."

The landlady turned the handle of the door and walked in with the tray. Mr. Sleuth was sitting close by the window and Mrs. Bunting's Bible lay open before him. As she came in, he hastily closed the Bible and looked down at the crowd walking along the Marylebone Road.

"There seem a great many people out today," he observed without looking round.

"Yes, sir, there do." Mrs. Bunting said nothing more, and offered no other explanation, and the lodger, as he at last turned to his landlady, smiled pleasantly. He had acquired a great liking and respect for this well behaved, taciturn woman—she was the first person for whom he had felt any such feeling for many years past.

He took a half sovereign out of his waistcoat pocket. Mrs. Bunting noticed it was not the same waistcoat Mr. Sleuth had been wearing the day before. "Will you please accept this half sovereign for the use of your kitchen last night?" he said. "I made as little mess as I could, but I was carrying on a rather elaborate experiment."

She held out her hand, hesitated, and then took the coin.

As she walked down the stairs, the winter sun, a yellow ball hanging in the smoky sky, glinted in on Mrs. Bunting and lent blood-red gleams, or so it seemed to her, to the piece of gold she was holding in her hand . . .

It was a very cold night—so cold, so windy, so snow-laden the atmosphere that everyone who could do so stayed indoors. Bunting, however, was on his way home from what had proved a very pleasant job—he had been acting as waiter at a young lady's birthday party, and a remarkable piece of luck had come his way. The young lady had come into a fortune that day and she had had the gracious, the surprising thought of presenting each of the hired waiters with a sovereign.

This birthday treat had put him in mind of another birthday. His daughter Daisy would be eighteen the following Saturday. Why shouldn't he send her a postal order for half a sovereign so that she might come up and spend her birthday in London?

Having Daisy for three or four days would cheer up Ellen. Mr. Bunting, slackening his footsteps, began to think with puzzled concern of how queer his wife had seemed lately. She had become so nervous, so jumpy, that he didn't know what to make of her sometimes.

She had never been a really good-tempered woman—your capable, self-respecting woman seldom is—but she had never been like what she was now. Of late she sometimes got quite hysterical. He had let fall a sharp word to her the other day and she had sat down on a chair, thrown her black apron over her face, and burst out sobbing violently.

During the last ten days she had taken to talking in her sleep. "No, no, no!" she had cried out only the night before. "It isn't true! I won't have it said! It's a lie!" And there had been a wail of horrible fear and revolt in her unusually quiet, mincing voice. Yes, it would certainly be a good thing for her to have Daisy's company for a bit. Whew! It *was* cold—and Bunting had stupidly forgotten his gloves. He put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm.

Suddenly he became aware that Mr. Sleuth, the lodger who seemed to have turned their luck, as it were, was walking on the opposite side of the solitary street.

Mr. Sleuth's tall, thin figure was rather bowed, his head bent toward the ground. His right arm was thrust into his long Inverness cape, the other occasionally sawed the air, doubtless in order to help him keep warm.

He was walking rather quickly and it was clear that he had not yet become aware of the proximity of his landlord.

Bunting felt pleased to see his lodger—it increased his feeling of general satisfaction. Strange, was it not, that that odd, peculiar-

looking figure should have made all the difference to his and Mrs. Bunting's happiness and comfort in life?

Naturally, Bunting saw far less of the lodger than did Mrs. Bunting. Their gentleman had made it very clear that he did not like either the husband or wife to come up to his rooms without being definitely asked to do so, and Bunting had been up there only once since Mr. Sleuth's arrival five weeks before. This seemed to be a good opportunity for a little genial conversation.

Bunting, still an active man for his years, crossed the road, and, stepping briskly forward, tried to overtake Mr. Sleuth, but the more he hurried the more the other hastened, and that without even turning to see whose steps he heard echoing behind him on the now freezing pavement. Mr. Sleuth's own footsteps were quite inaudible—an odd circumstance when you came to think of it, as Bunting did think of it later, lying awake by Ellen's side in the pitch-darkness. What it meant was, of course, that the lodger had rubber soles on his shoes.

The two men, the pursued and the pursuer, at last turned into the Marylebone Road. They were now within a hundred yards of home and so, plucking up courage, Bunting called out, his voice echoing freshly on the still air: "Mr. Sleuth, sir! Mr. Sleuth!"

The lodger stopped and turned round. He had been walking so quickly, and he was in so poor a physical condition, that the sweat was pouring down his face.

"Ah! So it's you, Mr. Bunting? I heard footsteps behind me, and I hurried on. I wish I'd known that it was only you—there are so many queer characters about at night in London."

"Not on a night like this, sir. Only honest folk who have business out of doors would be out such a night as this. It *is* cold, sir!" And then into Bunting's slow and honest mind there suddenly crept the query as to what Mr. Sleuth's own business out could be on this cold, bitter night.

"Cold?" the lodger repeated. "I can't say that I find it cold, Mr. Bunting. When the snow falls, the air always becomes milder."

"Yes, sir, but tonight there's such a sharp east wind. Why, it freezes the very marrow in one's bones!"

Bunting noticed that Mr. Sleuth kept his distance in a rather strange way—he walked at the edge of the pavement, leaving the rest of it, on the wall side, to his landlord.

"I lost my way," he said abruptly. "I've been over Primrose Hill to see a friend of mine, and then, coming back, I lost my way."

Bunting could well believe that, for when he had first noticed Mr. Sleuth he was coming from the east, and not, as he should have done if walking home from Primrose Hill, from the north. They had now reached the little gate that gave onto the shabby, paved court in front of the house. Mr. Sleuth was walking up the flagged path when, with a "By your leave, sir," the ex-butler, stepping aside, slipped in front of his lodger to open the front door for him.

As he passed by Mr. Sleuth, the back of Bunting's bare left hand brushed lightly against the long Inverness cape the other man was wearing and, to his surprise, the stretch of cloth against which his hand lay for a moment was not only damp—damp from the flakes of snow that had settled upon it—but wet and gluey. Bunting thrust his left hand into his pocket. It was with the other that he placed the key in the lock of the door.

The two men passed into the hall together. The house seemed blackly dark in comparison with the lighted road outside—and then, quite suddenly, there came over Bunting a feeling of mortal terror, an instinctive knowledge that some terrible and immediate danger was near him. A voice—the voice of his first wife, the long-dead girl to whom his mind so seldom reverted nowadays—uttered in his ear the words, "Take care!"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Bunting, that you must have felt something dirty, foul, on my coat? It's too long a story to tell you now, but I brushed up against a dead animal—a dead rabbit—lying across a bench on Primrose Hill." Mr. Sleuth spoke in a very quiet voice, almost in a whisper.

"No, sir—no, I didn't notice anything. I scarcely touched you, sir." It seemed as if a power outside himself compelled Bunting to utter these lying words. "And now, sir, I'll be saying good night to you," he added.

He waited until the lodger had gone upstairs and then he turned into his own sitting room. There he sat down, for he felt very queer. He did not draw his left hand out of his pocket till he heard the other man moving about in the room above. Then he lit the gas and held up his left hand. He put it close to his face. It was flecked, streaked with blood.

He took off his boots, and then, very quietly, he went into the room where his wife lay asleep. Stealthily, he walked across to the toilet table and dipped his hand into the water jug.

The next morning Mr. Sleuth's landlord awoke with a start—he

felt curiously heavy about the limbs and tired about the eyes. Drawing his watch from under his pillow, he saw that it was nearly nine o'clock. He and Ellen had overslept. Without waking her, he got out of bed and pulled up the blind. It was snowing heavily, and, as is the way when it snows, even in London, it was strangely, curiously still.

After he had dressed, he went out into the passage. A newspaper and a letter were lying on the mat. Fancy having slept through the postman's knock! He picked them both up and went into the sitting room, then he carefully shut the door behind him and tossing the letter aside, spread the newspaper wide open on the table and bent over it.

As Bunting at last looked up and straightened himself, a look of inexpressible relief shone upon his stolid face. The item of news he had felt certain would be there, printed in big type on the middle sheet, was not there.

He folded the paper and laid it on a chair and then eagerly took up his letter.

Dear Father [it ran]: I hope this finds you as well as it leaves me. Mrs. Puddle's youngest child has got scarlet fever and Aunt thinks I had better come away at once, just to stay with you for a few days. Please tell Ellen I won't give her no trouble.

Your loving daughter,
Daisy

Bunting felt amazingly lighthearted, and as he walked into the next room he smiled broadly.

"Ellen," he cried out, "here's news! Daisy's coming today. There's scarlet fever in their house and Martha thinks she had better come away for a few days. She'll be here for her birthday!"

Mrs. Bunting listened in silence—she did not even open her eyes. "I can't have the girl here just now," she said shortly. "I've got just as much as I can manage to do."

But Bunting felt pugnacious and so cheerful as to be almost lightheaded. Deep down in his heart he looked back to last night with a feeling of shame and self-rebuke. Whatever had made such horrible thoughts and suspicions come into his head?

"Of course Daisy will come here," he said shortly. "If it comes to that, she'll be able to help you with the work and she'll brisk us both up a bit."

Rather to his surprise, Mrs. Bunting said nothing in answer to

this, and he changed the subject abruptly. "The lodger and me came in together last night," he observed. "He's certainly a funny kind of gentleman. It wasn't the sort of night one would choose to go for a walk over Primrose Hill, and yet that was what he had been doing—so he said."

It stopped snowing about ten o'clock and the morning wore itself away. Just as twelve was striking, a four-wheeler drew up to the gate. It was Daisy—pink-cheeked, excited, laughing-eyed Daisy, a sight to gladden any father's heart. "Aunt said I was to have a cab if the weather was bad," she said.

There was a bit of a wrangle over the fare. King's Cross, as all the world knows, is nothing like two miles from the Marylebone Road, but the man clamored for one-and-sixpence and hinted darkly that he had done the young lady a favor in bringing her at all.

While he and Bunting were having words, Daisy, leaving them to it, walked up the path to the door where her stepmother was awaiting her.

Suddenly there fell loud shouts on the still air. They sounded strangely eerie, breaking sharply across the muffled, snowy air. "What's that?" said Bunting with a look of startled fear. "Why, whatever's that?"

The cabman lowered his voice. "Them are crying out that 'orrible affair at King's Cross. He's done for two of 'em this time! That's what I meant when I said I might have got a better fare. I wouldn't say anything before Missy there, but folk 'ave been coming from all over London—like a fire. Plenty of toffs, too. But there—there's nothing to see now."

"What! Another woman murdered last night?" Bunting felt and looked convulsed with horror.

The cabman stared at him, surprised. "Two of 'em, I tell yer—within a few yards of one another. He 'ave got a nerve—"

"Have they caught him?" asked Bunting perfunctorily.

"Lord, no! They'll never catch 'im! It must 'ave happened hours and hours ago—they was both stone-cold. One each end of an archway. That's why they didn't see 'em before."

The hoarse cries were coming nearer and nearer—two news vendors trying to outshout each other.

"'Orrible discovery near King's Cross!" they yelled exultantly. And as Bunting, with his daughter's bag in his hand, hurried up the path and passed through his front door, the words pursued him like a dreadful threat.

Angrily he shut out the hoarse, insistent cries. No, he had no wish to buy a paper. That kind of crime wasn't fit reading for a young girl, such a girl as was his Daisy, brought up as carefully as if she had been a young lady by her strict Methody aunt.

As he stood in his little hall trying to feel all right again, he could hear Daisy's voice—high, voluble, excited—giving her stepmother a long account of the scarlet-fever case to which she owed her presence in London. But as Bunting pushed open the door of the sitting room, there came a note of sharp alarm in his daughter's voice and he heard her say: "Why, Ellen! Whatever is the matter? You do look bad!" and his wife's muffled answer: "Open the window—do."

Rushing across the room, Bunting pushed up the sash. The newspaper sellers were now just outside the house. "'Orrible discovery near King's Cross—a clue to the murderer!" they yelled. And then, helplessly, Mrs. Bunting began to laugh. She laughed and laughed and laughed, rocking herself to and fro as if in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Why, Father, whatever's the matter with her?" Daisy looked quite scared.

"She's in 'sterics—that's what it is," he said shortly. "I'll just get the water jug. Wait a minute."

Bunting felt very put out, and yet glad, too, for this queer seizure of Ellen's almost made him forget the sick terror with which he had been possessed a moment before. That he and his wife should be obsessed by the same fear, the same terror, never crossed his simple, slow-working mind.

The lodger's bell rang. That, or the threat of the water jug, had a magical effect on Mrs. Bunting. She rose to her feet, still trembling, but composed. As she went upstairs, she felt her legs trembling under her and put out a shaking hand to clutch at the banister for support. She waited a few minutes on the landing and then knocked at the door of her lodger's parlor.

But Mr. Sleuth's voice answered her from the bedroom. "I'm not well," he called out querulously. "I think I caught a chill going out to see a friend last night. I'd be obliged if you'll bring me a cup of tea and put it outside my door, Mrs. Bunting."

"Very well, sir."

Mrs. Bunting went downstairs and made her lodger a cup of tea over the gas ring, Bunting watching her the while in heavy silence.

During their midday dinner, the husband and wife had a little discussion as to where Daisy should sleep. It had already been settled

that a bed should be made up for her in the sitting room, but Bunting saw reason to change this plan. As the two women were clearing away the dishes, he looked up and said shortly: "I think 'twould be better if Daisy were to sleep with you, Ellen, and I were to sleep in the sitting room."

Ellen acquiesced quietly.

Daisy was a good-natured girl. She liked London and wanted to make herself useful to her stepmother. "I'll wash up—don't you bother to come downstairs," she said.

Bunting began to walk up and down the room. His wife gave him a furtive glance—she wondered what he was thinking about.

"Didn't you get a paper?" she said at last.

"There's the paper," he said crossly, "the paper we always take in, the *Telegraph*." His look challenged her to a further question.

"I thought they was shouting something in the street—I mean, just before I was took bad."

But he made no answers. Instead, he went to the top of the staircase and called out sharply: "Daisy! Daisy, child, are you there?"

"Yes, Father," she answered from below.

"Better come upstairs out of that cold kitchen."

He came back into the sitting room again. "Ellen, is the lodger in? I haven't heard him moving about. I don't want Daisy to be mixed up with him."

"Mr. Sleuth is not well today," his wife answered. "He's remaining in bed a bit. Daisy needn't have anything to do with him. She'll have her work cut out looking after things down here. That's where I want her to help me."

"Agreed," he said.

When it grew dark, Bunting went out and bought an evening paper. He read it out of doors in the biting cold, standing beneath a streetlamp. He wanted to see what was the clue to the murderer.

The clue proved to be a very slender one—merely the imprint in the snowy slush of a half-worn rubber sole, and it was, of course, by no means certain that the sole belonged to the boot or shoe of the murderer of the two doomed women who had met so swift and awful a death in the arch near King's Cross station. The paper's special investigator pointed out that there were thousands of such soles being worn in London. Bunting found comfort in that obvious fact. He felt grateful to the special investigator for having stated it so clearly.

As he approached his house, he heard curious sounds coming from

the inner side of the low wall that shut off the courtyard from the pavement. Under ordinary circumstances, Bunting would have gone at once to drive whoever was there out into the roadway. Now he stayed outside, sick with suspense and anxiety. Was it possible that their place was being watched—already?

But it was only Mr. Sleuth. To Bunting's astonishment, the lodger suddenly stepped forward from behind the wall onto the flagged path. He was carrying a brown-paper parcel, and as he walked along the new boots he was wearing creaked and the tap of wooden heels rang out on the stones.

Bunting, still hidden outside the gate, suddenly understood what his lodger had been doing on the other side of the wall. Mr. Sleuth had been out to buy himself a pair of boots, and had gone inside the gate to put them on, placing his old footgear in the paper in which the new boots had been wrapped.

Bunting waited until Mr. Sleuth had let himself into the house, then he also walked up the flagged pathway and put his latchkey in the door.

In the next three days, each of Bunting's waking hours held its meed of aching fear and suspense. From his point of view, almost any alternative would be preferable to that which to most people would have seemed the only one open to him. He told himself that it would be ruin for him and for his Ellen to be mixed up publicly in such a terrible affair. It would track them to their dying day.

Bunting was also always debating within himself as to whether he should tell Ellen of his frightful suspicion. He couldn't believe that what had become so plain to himself could long be concealed from all the world, and yet he did not credit his wife with the same intelligence. He didn't even notice that, although she waited on Mr. Sleuth as assiduously as ever, Mrs. Bunting never mentioned the lodger.

Mr. Sleuth, meanwhile, kept upstairs—he had given up going out altogether. He still felt, so he assured his landlady, far from well.

Daisy was another complication, the more so that the girl, whom her father longed to send away and whom he would hardly let out of his sight, showed herself inconveniently inquisitive concerning the lodger.

"Whatever does he do with himself all day?" she asked her step-mother.

"Well, just now he's reading the Bible," Mrs. Bunting had answered, very shortly and drily.

"Well, I never—that's a funny thing for a gentleman to do!" Such had been Daisy's pert remark, and her stepmother had snubbed her well for it.

Daisy's eighteenth birthday dawned uneventfully. Her father gave her what he had always promised she should have on her eighteenth birthday—a watch. It was a pretty little silver watch, which Bunting had bought secondhand on the last day he had been happy. It seemed a long time ago now.

Mrs. Bunting thought a silver watch a very extravagant present, but she had always had the good sense not to interfere between her husband and his child. Besides, her mind was now full of other things. She was beginning to fear that Bunting suspected something, and she was filled with watchful anxiety and unease. What if he were to do anything silly—mix them up with the police, for instance? It certainly would be ruination to them both. But one never knew with men! Her husband, however, kept his own counsel absolutely.

Daisy's birthday was on Saturday. In the middle of the morning, Ellen and Daisy went down into the kitchen. Bunting didn't like the feeling that there was only one flight of stairs between Mr. Sleuth and himself, so he quietly slipped out of the house and went to buy himself an ounce of tobacco.

In the last four days, Bunting had avoided his usual haunts. But today the unfortunate man had a curious longing for human companionship—companionship, that is, other than that of Ellen and Daisy. This feeling led him into a small, populous thoroughfare hard by the Edgware Road. There were more people there than usual, for the housewives of the neighborhood were doing their marketing for Sunday.

Bunting passed the time of day with the tobacconist, and the two fell into desultory talk. To the ex-butler's surprise, the man said nothing at all to him on the subject of which all the neighborhood must still be talking.

And then, quite suddenly, while still standing by the counter, and before he had paid for the packet of tobacco he held in his hand, Bunting, through the open door, saw with horrified surprise that his wife was standing outside a greengrocer's shop just opposite. Muttering a word of apology, he rushed out of the shop and across the road.

"Ellen!" he gasped hoarsely. "You've never gone and left my little girl alone in the house?"

Mrs. Bunting's face went chalky white. "I thought you were home," she said. "You *were* home. Whatever made you come out without first making sure I was there?"

Bunting made no answers, but as they stared at each other in exasperated silence *each knew that the other knew*.

They turned and scurried down the street.

"Don't run," he said suddenly, "we shall get there just as quickly if we walk fast. People are noticing you, Ellen. Don't run." He spoke breathlessly, but it was breathlessness induced by fear and excitement, not by the quick pace at which they were walking.

At last they reached their own gate. Bunting pushed past in front of his wife. After all, Daisy was his child—Ellen couldn't know what he was feeling. He made the path almost in one leap and fumbled for a moment with his latchkey. The door opened.

"Daisy!" he called out in a wailing voice, "Daisy, my dear, where are you?"

"Here I am, Father—what is it?"

"She's all right!" Bunting turned his grey face to his wife. "She's all right, Ellen!" Then he waited a moment, leaning against the wall of the passage. "It did give me a turn," he said—and then, warningly, "Don't frighten the girl, Ellen."

Daisy was standing before the fire in the sitting room, admiring herself in the glass. "Oh, Father," she said, without turning round, "I've seen the lodger! He's quite a nice gentleman—though, to be sure, he does look a cure! He came down to ask Ellen for something and we had quite a nice little chat. I told him it was my birthday and he asked me to go to Madame Tussaud's with him this afternoon." She laughed a little self-consciously. "Of course, I could see he was 'centric, and then at first he spoke so funnily. 'And who be you?' he says, threateninglike. And I says to him, 'I'm Mr. Bunting's daughter, sir.' Then you're a very fortunate girl—that's what he said, Ellen—to 'ave such a nice stepmother as you've got. That's why,' he says, 'you look such a good, innocent girl.' And then he quoted a bit of the prayer book at me. 'Keep innocency,' he says, wagging his head at me. Lor'! It made me feel as if I was with Aunt again."

"I won't have you going out with the lodger—that's flat." Bunting was wiping his forehead with one hand while with the other he

mechanically squeezed the little packet of tobacco for which, he now remembered, he had forgotten to pay.

Daisy pouted. "Oh, Father, I think you might let me have a treat on my birthday! I told him Saturday wasn't a very good day—at least, so I'd heard—for Madame Tussaud's. Then he said we could go early, while the fine folk are still having their dinners. He wants you to come, too." She turned to her stepmother, then giggled happily. "The lodger has a wonderful fancy for you, Ellen—if I was Father, I'd feel quite jealous!"

Her last words were cut across by a loud knock on the door. Bunting and his wife looked at each other apprehensively.

Both felt a curious thrill of relief when they saw that it was only Mr. Sleuth—Mr. Sleuth dressed to go out. The tall hat he had worn when he first came to them was in his hand and he was wearing a heavy overcoat.

"I saw you had come in"—he addressed Mrs. Bunting in his high, whistling, hesitating voice—"and so I've come down to ask if you and Miss Bunting will come to Madame Tussaud's. I have never seen these famous waxworks, though I've heard of the place all my life."

As Bunting forced himself to look fixedly at his lodger, a sudden doubt, bringing with it a sense of immeasurable relief, came to him. Surely it was inconceivable that this gentle, mild-mannered gentleman could be the monster of cruelty and cunning that Bunting had but a moment ago believed him to be. "You're very kind, sir, I'm sure." He tried to catch his wife's eye, but Mrs. Bunting was looking away, staring into vacancy. She still, of course, wore the bonnet and cloak in which she had just been out to do her marketing. Daisy was already putting on her hat and coat.

Madame Tussaud's had hitherto held pleasant memories for Mrs. Bunting. In the days when she and Bunting were courting, they often spent part of their afternoon out there. The butler had an acquaintance, a man named Hopkins, who was one of the waxworks' staff, and this man had sometimes given him passes for "self and lady." But this was the first time Mrs. Bunting had been inside the place since she had come to live almost next door, as it were, to the big building.

The ill-sorted trio walked up the great staircase and into the first gallery, and there Mr. Sleuth suddenly stopped short. The presence

of those curious, still figures, suggesting death in life, seemed to surprise and affright him.

Daisy took quick advantage of the lodger's hesitation and unease. "Oh, Ellen," she cried, "do let us begin by going into the Chamber of Horrors! I've never been in there. Aunt made Father promise he wouldn't take me, the only time I've ever been here, but now that I'm eighteen I can do just as I like. Besides, Aunt will never know!"

Mr. Sleuth looked down at her. "Yes," he said, "let us go into the Chamber of Horrors—that's a good idea, Miss Bunting."

They turned into the great room in which the Napoleonic relics are kept, and which leads into the curious, vaultlike chamber where waxen effigies of dead criminals stand grouped in wooden docks. Mrs. Bunting was at once disturbed and relieved to see her husband's old acquaintance, Mr. Hopkins, in charge of the turnstile admitting the public to the Chamber of Horrors.

"Well, you *are* a stranger," the man observed genially. "I do believe this is the very first time I've seen you in here, Mrs. Bunting, since you married!"

"Yes," she said, "that's so. And this is my husband's daughter, Daisy—I expect you've heard of her, Mr. Hopkins. And this"—she hesitated a moment—"is our lodger, Mr. Sleuth."

But Mr. Sleuth frowned and shuffled away. Daisy, leaving her stepmother's side, joined him.

Mrs. Bunting put down three sixpences.

"Wait a minute," said Hopkins, "you can't go into the Chamber of Horrors just yet. But you won't have to wait more than four or five minutes, Mrs. Bunting. It's this way, you see—our boss is in there, showing a party round." He lowered his voice. "It's Sir John Burney—I suppose you know who Sir John Burney is?"

"No," she answered indifferently, "I don't know that I ever heard of him." She felt slightly—oh, very slightly—uneasy about Daisy. She would like her stepdaughter to keep well within sight and sound. Mr. Sleuth was taking the girl to the other end of the room.

"Well, I hope you never *will* know him—not in any personal sense, Mrs. Bunting." The man chuckled. "He's the Head Commissioner of Police. One of the gentlemen he's showing round our place is the Paris Prefect of Police, whose job is on all fours, so to speak, with Sir John's. The Frenchy has brought his daughter with him, and there are several other ladies. Ladies always like 'orrors, Mrs. Bunting, that's our experience here. 'Oh, take me to the Chamber of

'Orrors!'—that's what they say the minute they gets into the building."

A group of people, all talking and laughing together, were advancing from within toward the turnstile. Mrs. Bunting stared at them nervously. She wondered which of them was the gentleman with whom Mr. Hopkins had hoped she would never be brought into personal contact.

She quickly picked him out. He was a tall, powerful, nice-looking gentleman with a commanding manner. Just now he was smiling down into the face of a young lady. "Monsieur Barberoux is quite right," he was saying, "the English law is too kind to the criminal, especially to the murderer. If we conducted our trials in the French fashion, the place we have just left would be very much fuller than it is today. A man of whose guilt we are absolutely assured is oftener than not acquitted, and then the public taunt us with another undiscovered crime."

"D'you mean, Sir John, that murderers sometimes escape scot-free? Take the man who has been committing all those awful murders this last month. Of course, I don't know much about it, Father won't let me read about it, but I can't help being interested." Her girlish voice rang out and Mrs. Bunting heard every word distinctly.

The party gathered round, listening eagerly to hear what the Head Commissioner would say next.

"Yes." He spoke very deliberately. "I think we may say—now, don't give me away to a newspaper fellow, Miss Rose—that we do know perfectly well who the murderer in question is."

Several of those standing nearby uttered expressions of surprise and incredulity.

"Then why don't you catch him?" cried the girl indignantly.

"I didn't say we know *where* he is—I only said we know *who* he is. Or, rather, perhaps I ought to say that we have a very strong suspicion of his identity."

Sir John's French colleague looked up quickly. "The Hamburg and Liverpool man?" he said interrogatively.

The other nodded. "Yes. I suppose you've had the case turned up?" Then, speaking very quickly, as if he wished to dismiss the subject from his own mind and from that of his auditors, he went on: "Two murders of the kind were committed eight years ago—one in Hamburg, the other just afterward in Liverpool, and there were certain peculiarities connected with the crimes which made it clear they were committed by the same hand. The perpetrator was caught,

fortunately for us red-handed, just as he was leaving the house of his victim—for in Liverpool the murder was committed in a house. I myself saw the unhappy man—I say unhappy, for there is no doubt at all that he was mad.”

He hesitated, and added in a lower tone, “Suffering from an acute form of religious mania. I myself saw him at some length. But now comes the really interesting point. Just a month ago, this criminal lunatic, as we must regard him, made his escape from the asylum where he was confined. He arranged the whole thing with extraordinary cunning and intelligence, and we should probably have caught him long ago were it not that he managed, when on his way out of the place, to annex a considerable sum of money in gold with which the wages of the staff were about to be paid.”

The Frenchman again spoke. “Why have you not circulated a description?” he asked.

“We did that at once”—Sir John Burney smiled a little grimly—“but only among our own people. We dare not circulate the man’s description among the general public. You see, we may be mistaken, after all.”

“That is not very probable.” The Frenchman smiled a satirical little smile.

A moment later the party were walking in Indian file through the turnstile, Sir John Burney leading the way.

Mrs. Bunting looked straight before her. Even had she wished to do so, she had neither time nor power to warn her lodger of his danger.

Daisy and her companion were now coming down the room, bearing straight for the Head Commissioner of Police. In another moment Mr. Sleuth and Sir John Burney would be face to face.

Suddenly Mr. Sleuth swerved to one side. A terrible change came over his pale, narrow face—it became discomposed, livid with rage and terror.

But, to Mrs. Bunting’s relief—yes, to her inexpressible relief—Sir John Burney and his friends swept on. They passed by Mr. Sleuth unconcernedly, unaware, or so it seemed to her, that there was anyone else in the room but themselves.

“Hurry up, Mrs. Bunting,” said the turnstile keeper, “you and your friends will have the place all to yourselves.” From an official he had become a man, and it was the man in Mr. Hopkins that gallantly addressed pretty Daisy Bunting. “It seems strange that a

young lady like you should want to go in and see all those 'orrible frights," he said jestingly.

"Mrs. Bunting, may I trouble you to come over here for a moment?" The words were hissed rather than spoken by Mr. Sleuth.

His landlady took a doubtful step forward.

"A last word with you, Mrs. Bunting." The lodger's face was still distorted with fear and passion. "Do you think to escape the consequences of your hideous treachery? I trusted you, Mrs. Bunting, and you betrayed me! But I am protected by a higher power, for I still have work to do. Your end will be bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword. Your feet shall go down to death, and your steps take hold on hell." Even while Mr. Sleuth was uttering these strange, dreadful words, he was looking around, his eyes glancing this way and that, seeking a way of escape.

At last his eyes became fixed on a small placard placed about a curtain. EMERGENCY EXIT was written there. Leaving his landlady's side, he walked over to the turnstile. He fumbled in his pocket for a moment and then touched the man on the arm. "I feel ill," he said, speaking rapidly, "very ill indeed! It's the atmosphere of this place. I want you to let me out by the quickest way. It would be a pity for me to faint here—especially with ladies about." His left hand shot out and placed what he had been fumbling for in his pocket on the other's bare palm. "I see there's an emergency exit over there. Would it be possible for me to get out that way?"

"Well, yes, sir, I think so." The man hesitated—he felt a slight, very slight, feeling of misgiving. He looked at Daisy, flushed and smiling, happy and unconcerned, and then at Mrs. Bunting. She was very pale—but then surely her lodger's sudden seizure was enough to make her feel worried. Hopkins felt the half sovereign pleasantly tickling his palm. The Prefect of Police had given him only half a crown—mean, shabby foreigner.

"Yes, I can let you out that way," he said at last, "and perhaps when you're standing out in the air on the iron balcony you'll feel better. But then, you know, sir, you'll have to come round to the front if you want to come in again, for those emergency doors only open outward."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Sleuth hurriedly, "I quite understand! If I feel better, I'll come in by the front way and pay another shilling!"

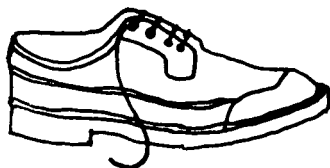
"You needn't do that if you'll just explain what happened here."

The man went and pulled the curtain aside, and put his shoulder against the door. It burst open and the light for a moment blinded

Mr. Sleuth. He passed his hand over his eyes. "Thank you," he said, "thank you. I shall get all right here."

Five days later, Bunting identified the body of a man found drowned in the Regent's Canal as that of his late lodger. And the morning following, a gardener working in the Regent's Park found a newspaper in which were wrapped, together with a half-worn pair of rubber-soled shoes, two surgical knives. This fact was not chronicled in any newspaper, but a very pretty and picturesque paragraph went the round of the press, about the same time, concerning a small box filled with sovereigns which had been forwarded anonymously to the governor of the Foundling Hospital.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunting are now in the service of an old lady, by whom they are feared as well as respected, and whom they make very comfortable.



EDITORIAL NOTE: Five Jack the Ripper murders were committed in London in the fall of 1888. In September, Tor Books is publishing *Ripper!*—edited by Susan Caspar and Gardner Dozois, and consisting of fiction about the legendary murderer who vanished without a trace 100 years ago by Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, and others.

Lucille Fletcher

Sorry, Wrong Number

The Characters

MRS. STEVENSON

1ST OPERATOR

1ST MAN

2ND MAN

CHIEF OPERATOR

2ND OPERATOR

3RD OPERATOR

4TH OPERATOR

5TH OPERATOR

INFORMATION

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

WESTERN UNION

SERGEANT DUFFY

A LUNCHROOM-COUNTER ATTENDANT

SCENE: *As the curtain rises, we see a divided stage, only the center part of which is lighted and furnished as MRS. STEVENSON's bedroom. Expensive, rather fussy furnishings. A large bed, on which MRS. STEVENSON, clad in a bedjacket, is lying. A nighttable close by, with phone, lighted lamp, and pill bottles. A mantel, with clock, R. A closed door, R. A window, with curtains closed, rear. The set is lit by one lamp on nighttable. Beyond this central set, the stage on either side is in darkness.*

MRS. STEVENSON *is dialing a number on the phone as the curtain rises. She listens to the phone, slams down the receiver in irritation. As she does so, we hear the sound of a train roaring by in the distance. She reaches for her pill bottle, pours herself a glass of water, shakes out a pill, swallows it, then reaches for the phone again; dials the number nervously.* SOUND: *Number being dialed on the phone. Busy signal.*

MRS. STEVENSON: *(a querulous, self-centered neurotic)* Oh, dear!
(Slams down receiver. Dials OPERATOR. A spotlight, L. of side

flat, picks up out of peripheral darkness the figure of 1ST OPERATOR sitting with headphones at small table.)

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: Operator? I've been dialing Murray Hill 4-0098 for the last three quarters of an hour and the line is always busy. But I don't see how it *could* be busy that long. Will you try it for me, please?

OPERATOR: Murray Hill 4-0098? One moment, please. *(She makes gesture of plugging in call through a switchboard.)*

MRS. STEVENSON: I don't see how it could be busy all this time. It's my husband's office. He's working late tonight and I'm all alone here in the house. My health is very poor and I've been feeling so nervous all day.

OPERATOR: Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. *(SOUND: Phone buzz. It rings three times. Receiver is picked up at the other end. Spotlight picks up a figure of a heavy-set man seated at a desk with a phone on R. side of dark periphery of stage. He is wearing a hat. Picks up phone.)*

MAN: Hello.

MRS. STEVENSON: Hello? *(A little puzzled)* Hello. Is Mr. Stevenson there?

MAN: *(Into phone, as though he has not heard)* Hello. *(Louder)* Hello. *(Spotlight on L. now moves from OPERATOR to another man, GEORGE—a killer type, also wearing a hat, but standing as in a phone booth.)*

2ND MAN: *(Slow heavy quality, faintly foreign accent)* Hello.

1ST MAN: Hello? George?

GEORGE: Yes, sir.

MRS. STEVENSON: *(Louder and more imperious, to phone)* Hello. Who's this? What number am I calling, please?

1ST MAN: We have heard from our client. He says the coast is clear for tonight.

GEORGE: Yes, sir.

1ST MAN: Where are you now?

GEORGE: In a phone booth.

1ST MAN: Okay. You know the address. At eleven o'clock, the private patrolman goes around to the bar on Second Avenue for a beer. Be sure that all the lights downstairs are out. There should be only one light visible from the street. At eleven-fifteen, a subway train crosses the bridge. It makes a noise in case her window is open and she should scream.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Shocked*) Oh—hello! What number is this, please?

GEORGE: Okay. I understand.

1ST MAN: Make it quick. As little blood as possible. Our client does not wish to make her suffer long.

GEORGE: A knife okay?

1ST MAN: Yes. A knife will be okay. And remember—remove the rings and bracelets, and the jewelry in the bureau drawer. Our client wishes it to look like simple robbery.

GEORGE: Okay—I get— (*Spotlight suddenly goes out on GEORGE.*

SOUND: *A bland buzzing signal. Spotlight goes off on 1ST MAN.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Clicking phone*) Oh! (*Bland buzzing signal continues. She hangs up.*) How awful! How unspeakably— (*She lies back on her pillows, overcome for a few seconds, then suddenly pulls herself together, reaches for phone.* SOUND: *Dialing. Phone buzz. Spotlight goes on at 1ST OPERATOR's switchboard. 1ST and 2ND MAN exit as unobtrusively as possible, in darkness.*)

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Unnerved and breathless, into phone*) Operator, I—I've just been cut off.

OPERATOR: I'm sorry, madam. What number were you calling?

MRS. STEVENSON: It was supposed to be Murray Hill 4-0098, but it wasn't. Some wires must have crossed—I was cut into a wrong number. And I've just heard the most dreadful thing—a—a murder—and (*Imperiously*) you'll simply have to retrace that call at once, Operator.

OPERATOR: I beg your pardon, madam, I don't quite—

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh, I know it was a wrong number and I had no business listening, but these two men—they were cold-blooded fiends and they were going to murder somebody—some poor innocent woman who was all alone—in a house near a bridge. And we've got to stop them—

OPERATOR: (*Patiently*) What number were you calling, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: That doesn't matter. This was a *wrong* number. And you dialed it. And we've got to find out what it was—immediately!

OPERATOR: But, madam—

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh, why are you so stupid? Look—it was obviously a case of some little slip of the finger. I told you to try Murray Hill 4-0098 for me—you dialed it but your finger must have slipped and I was connected with some other number. I could hear them, but they couldn't hear me. I simply fail to see why

you couldn't make that same mistake again—on purpose. Why you couldn't *try* to dial Murray Hill 4-0098 in the same careless sort of way—

OPERATOR: (*Quickly*) Murray Hill 4-0098? I will try to get it for you, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Sarcastically*) Thank you. (*She bridles, adjusts herself on her pillows, reaches for a handkerchief and wipes her forehead, glancing uneasily for a moment toward the window. Sound of ringing and busy signal.*)

OPERATOR: I'm sorry. Murray Hill 4-0098 is busy.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Frantically clicking receiver*) Operator—operator!

OPERATOR: Yes, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Angrily*) You *didn't* try to get that wrong number at all. I asked explicitly and all you did was dial correctly.

OPERATOR: I'm sorry. What number were you calling?

MRS. STEVENSON: Can't you forget what number I was calling and do something specific? I want to trace that call. It's my civic duty—it's *your* civic duty—to trace that call and to apprehend those dangerous killers. And if you won't—

OPERATOR: (*Glancing around wearily*) I will connect you with the Chief Operator.

MRS. STEVENSON: Please! (*Sound of ringing. OPERATOR puts hand over mouthpiece of phone, gestures into darkness.*)

OPERATOR: (*A half whisper*) Miss Curtis, will you pick up on seventeen, please? (*MISS CURTIS, Chief Operator, enters. Middle-aged, efficient, pleasant. Wearing headphone.*)

MISS CURTIS: Yes, dear. What's the trouble?

OPERATOR: Somebody wanting a call traced. I can't make head nor tail of it.

MISS CURTIS: (*Sitting down at desk as OPERATOR gets up*) Sure, dear. (*She makes gesture of plugging in her headphone, coolly and professionally.*) This is the Chief Operator.

MRS. STEVENSON: Chief Operator? I want you to trace a call. Immediately. I don't know where it came from, or who was making it, but it's absolutely necessary that it be tracked down. It was about a murder, a terrible, cold-blooded murder of a poor innocent woman—tonight, at eleven-fifteen.

CHIEF OPERATOR: I see.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*High-strung, demanding*) Can you trace it for me? Can you track down those men?

CHIEF OPERATOR: It depends, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: Depends on what?

CHIEF OPERATOR: It depends on whether the call is still going on. If it's a live call, we can trace it on the equipment. If it's been disconnected, we can't.

MRS. STEVENSON: Disconnected?

CHIEF OPERATOR: If the parties have stopped talking to each other.

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh, but of course they must have stopped talking to each other by *now*. That was at least five minutes ago.

CHIEF OPERATOR: Well, I can try tracing it. (*She takes a pencil out of her hair.*) What is your name, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. But listen—

CHIEF OPERATOR: (*Writing*) And your telephone number?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*More irritated*) Plaza 4-2295. But if you go on wasting all this time—(*She glances at clock on the mantel.*)

CHIEF OPERATOR: And what is your reason for wanting this call traced?

MRS. STEVENSON: My reason? Well, for heaven's sake, isn't it obvious? I overhear two men planning to murder this woman—it's a matter for the police!

CHIEF OPERATOR: Have you told the police?

MRS. STEVENSON: No. How could I?

CHIEF OPERATOR: You're making this check into a private call purely as a private individual?

MRS. STEVENSON: Yes. But meanwhile—

CHIEF OPERATOR: Well, Mrs. Stevenson, I seriously doubt whether we could make this check for you at this time just on your say-so as a private individual. We'd have to have something more official.

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh, for heaven's sake! You mean to tell me I can't report a murder without getting tied up in all this red tape? It's perfectly idiotic. All right, then, I *will* call the police. (*She slams down the receiver. Spotlight goes off two OPERATORS.*) Ridiculous! (*Sound of dialing as MRS. STEVENSON dials phone and two OPERATORS exit unobtrusively in darkness. On R. of stage, spotlight picks up a 2ND OPERATOR, seated like first, with headphone at table—same one vacated by 1ST MAN.*)

2ND OPERATOR: Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Very annoyed*) The Police Department—please.

2ND OPERATOR: Ringing the Police Department. (*Ring twice. At table L. spotlight now picks up SERGEANT DUFFY, seated in a relaxed position. Just entering beside him is a young man in a cap and*

apron, carrying a large brown-paper parcel, delivery boy for a local lunch counter. Phone is ringing.)

YOUNG MAN: Here's your lunch, Sarge. They didn't have no jelly doughnuts, so I got French crullers, okay?

DUFFY: French crullers. I got ulcers. Whyn't you make it apple pie? (*Picks up phone*) Police Department, Precinct 43, Duffy speaking.

LUNCHROOM ATTENDANT: (*Anxiously*) We don't have no apple pie, either, Sarge.

MRS. STEVENSON: Police Department? Oh. This is Mrs. Stevenson—Mrs. Elbert Smythe Stevenson of 53 North Sutton Place. I'm calling to report a murder. (*DUFFY has been examining lunch, but double-takes suddenly on above.*)

DUFFY: Eh?

MRS. STEVENSON: I mean, the murder hasn't been committed yet, I just overheard plans for it over the telephone—over a wrong number the operator gave me. (*DUFFY relaxes, sighs, starts taking lunch from bag.*) I've been trying to trace the call myself, but everybody is so stupid—and I guess in the end you're the only people who could do anything.

DUFFY: (*Not too impressed*) Yes, ma'am. (*ATTENDANT exits.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Trying to impress him*) It was perfectly definite murder. I heard their plans distinctly. (*DUFFY begins to eat sandwich, phone at his ear.*) Two men were talking, and they were going to murder some woman at eleven-fifteen tonight—she lived in a house near a bridge.

DUFFY: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STEVENSON: There was a private patrolman on the street who was going to go around for a beer on Second Avenue. And there was some third man, a client, who was paying to have this poor woman murdered. They were going to take her rings and bracelets—and use a knife. Well, it's unnerved me dreadfully—and I'm not well.

DUFFY: I see. (*He wipes his mouth with a paper napkin.*) When was all this, ma'am?

MRS. STEVENSON: About eight minutes ago. Oh—(*Relieved*)—then you can do something? You do understand.

DUFFY: And what is your name, ma'am? (*He reaches for a pad of paper.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Impatiently*) Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson.

DUFFY: And your address?

MRS. STEVENSON: 53 North Sutton Place. *That's* near a bridge. The Queensboro Bridge, you know—and *we* have a private patrolman on *our* street. And Second Avenue—

DUFFY: And what was that number you were calling?

MRS. STEVENSON: Murray Hill 4-0098. (*DUFFY writes it down.*) But that wasn't the number I overheard. I mean Murray Hill 4-0098 is my husband's office. (*DUFFY, in exasperation, holds his pencil poised.*) He's working late tonight and I was trying to reach him to ask him to come home. I'm an invalid, and it's the maid's night off, and I *hate* to be alone even though he says I'm perfectly safe as long as I have the telephone right beside my bed.

DUFFY: (*Stolidly*) Well, we'll look into it, Mrs. Stevenson, and see if we can check it with the telephone company.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Getting impatient*) But the telephone company said they couldn't check the call if the parties had stopped talking. I've already taken care of that.

DUFFY: Oh—yes? (*He yawns slightly.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: Personally, I feel you ought to do something far more immediate and drastic than just check the call. What good does checking the call do if they've stopped talking? By the time you track it down, they'll already have committed the murder.

DUFFY: (*He reaches for a paper cup of coffee.*) Well, we'll take care of it, lady. Don't worry. (*He begins to remove the top of the coffee container.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: I'd say the whole thing calls for a complete and thorough search of the whole city. (*DUFFY puts down the phone to work on the cup as her voice continues.*) I'm very near a bridge, and I'm not far from Second Avenue. And I know I'd feel a whole lot better if you sent around a radio car to *this* neighborhood at once.

DUFFY: (*Picks up phone again, drinks coffee*) And what makes you think the murder's going to be committed in your neighborhood, ma'am?

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh, I don't know—the coincidence is so horrible. Second Avenue—the bridge—

DUFFY: Second Avenue is a very long street, ma'am. And do you happen to know how many bridges there are in the city of New York? How do you know there isn't some little house out on Staten Island—on some little Second Avenue you never heard

about? (*He takes a long gulp of coffee.*) How do you know they were even talking about New York at all?

MRS. STEVENSON: But I heard the call on the New York dialing system.

DUFFY: How do you know it wasn't a long-distance call you overheard? Telephones are funny things. (*He sets down coffee.*) Look, lady, why don't you look at it this way? Supposing you hadn't broken in on that telephone call? Supposing you'd got your husband the way you always do? Would this murder have made any difference to you then?

MRS. STEVENSON: I suppose not. But it's so inhuman—so cold-blooded—

DUFFY: A lot of murders are committed in this city every day, ma'am. If we could do something to stop 'em, we would. But a clue of this kind that's so vague isn't much more use to us than no clue at all.

MRS. STEVENSON: But surely—

DUFFY: Unless, of course, you have some reason for thinking this call is phony, and that someone may be planning to murder you?

MRS. STEVENSON: *Me?* Oh, no—I hardly think so. I mean—why should anybody? I'm alone all day and night. I see nobody except my maid Eloise—she's a big two-hundred-pound woman too lazy to bring up my breakfast tray—and the only other person is my husband Elbert. He's crazy about me—adores me—waits on me hand and foot. He's scarcely left my side since I took sick twelve years ago—

DUFFY: Well, then, there's nothing for you to worry about, is there? (*The LUNCHROOM-COUNTER ATTENDANT has entered. He is carrying a piece of apple pie on a plate and points it out to DUFFY triumphantly.*) And now, if you'll just leave the rest of this to us—

MRS. STEVENSON: But what will you *do*? It's so late—it's nearly eleven o'clock.

DUFFY: (*Firmly*) We'll take care of it, lady.

MRS. STEVENSON: Will you broadcast it all over the city? And send out squads? And warn your radio cars to watch out—especially in suspicious neighborhoods like mine? (*The ATTENDANT, in triumph, has put the pie down in front of DUFFY.*)

DUFFY: (*More firmly*) Lady, I said we'd take care of it. Just now I've

got a couple of other matters here on my desk that require my immediate—

MRS. STEVENSON: Oh! (*She slams down receiver hard*). Idiot! (DUFFY, listening at the phone, hangs up and shrugs, then attacks his pie as spotlight fades out. MRS. STEVENSON, in bed, looks at the phone nervously.) Why did I do that? Now he'll think I am a fool. (*She sits tensely, then throws herself back against the pillows, lying there a moment, whimpering with self-pity*). Oh, why doesn't Elbert come home? Why doesn't he? (*We hear sound of train roaring by in the distance. She sits up, reaching for phone. Sound of dialing operator. Spotlight picks up 2ND OPERATOR, seated R.*)

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: Operator—for heaven's sake—will you ring that Murray Hill 4-0098 number again? I can't think what's keeping him so long.

OPERATOR: Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. (*Rings—busy signal.*) The line is busy. Shall I—

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Nastily*) I can hear it, you don't have to tell me it's busy! (*Slams down receiver. Spotlight fades off on 2ND OPERATOR. MRS. STEVENSON sinks back against the pillows again, whimpering to herself fretfully. She glances at the clock, then, turning, punches her pillows up, trying to make herself comfortable. But she isn't and she whimpers to herself as she squirms restlessly in bed.*) If I could only get out of this bed for a little while. If I could get a breath of fresh air—or just lean out the window—and see the street. (*She sighs, reaches for pill bottle, and shakes out a pill. As she does, the phone rings and she darts for it instantly*). Hello, Elbert? Hello. Hello. Hello. Oh—what's the matter with this phone? Hello? Hello? (*Slams down the receiver and stares at it tensely. The phone rings again. Once. She picks it up.*) Hello? Hello! Oh, for heaven's sake, who is this? Hello. Hello. Hello. (*Slamming down the receiver, she dials the operator. Spotlight comes on L., showing 3RD OPERATOR, at spot vacated by DUFFY.*)

3RD OPERATOR: Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Very annoyed and imperious*) Hello, Operator. I don't know what's the matter with this telephone tonight, but it's positively driving me crazy. I've never seen such inefficient, miserable service. Now, look. I'm an invalid, and I'm very nervous, and I'm not supposed to be annoyed. But if this keeps on much longer—

3RD OPERATOR: (*A young, sweet type*) What seems to be the trouble, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: *Everything's* wrong. The whole world could be murdered for all you people care! And now my phone keeps ringing!

OPERATOR: Yes, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: Ringing and ringing and ringing every five seconds or so, and when I pick it up there's no one there!

OPERATOR: I'm sorry, madam. If you'll hang up, I'll test it for you.

MRS. STEVENSON: I don't want you to test it for me, I want you to put through that call—whatever it is—at once.

OPERATOR: (*Gently*) I'm afraid that's not possible, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Storming*) Not possible? And why, may I ask?

OPERATOR: The system is automatic, madam. If someone is trying to dial your number, there's no way to check whether the call is coming through the system or not—unless the person who is trying to reach you complains to his particular operator.

MRS. STEVENSON: Well, of all the stupid, complicated— And meanwhile *I've* got to sit here in my bed, *suffering* every time that phone rings, imagining everything!

OPERATOR: I'll try to check it for you, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: Check it! Check it! That's all anybody can do. Of all the stupid, idiotic— (*She hangs up.*) Oh, what's the use! 3RD OPERATOR fades out of spotlight as MRS. STEVENSON's phone rings again. *She picks up the receiver.*) Hello! Hello! Stop ringing, do you hear me? Answer me! What do you want? Do you realize you're driving me crazy? (*Spotlight goes on R. We see a MAN in eyeshade and shirtsleeves at a desk with a phone and telegrams.*) Stark, staring—

WESTERN UNION: (*Dull, flat voice*) Hello. Is this Plaza 4-2295?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Catching her breath*) Yes. Yes. This is Plaza 4-2295.

WESTERN UNION: This is Western Union. I have a telegram here for Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. Is there anyone there to receive the message?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Trying to calm herself*) I am Mrs. Stevenson.

WESTERN UNION: (*Reading flatly*) The telegram is as follows: "Mrs. Elbert Stevenson, 53 North Sutton Place, New York, New York. Darling. Terribly sorry. Tried to get you for last hour, but line busy. Leaving for Boston eleven P.M. tonight on urgent business. Back tomorrow afternoon. Keep happy. Love. Signed, Elbert."

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Breathlessly, aghast, to herself*) Oh, no—

WESTERN UNION: That's all, madam. Do you wish us to deliver a copy of the message?

MRS. STEVENSON: No—no, thank you.

WESTERN UNION: Thank you, madam. Goodnight. *(He hangs up the phone. Spotlight on WESTERN UNION immediately out.)*

MRS. STEVENSON: *(Mechanically, to phone)* Goodnight. *(She hangs up slowly, suddenly bursting into)* No—no—it isn't true! He couldn't do it! Not when he knows I'll be all alone! It's some trick—some fiendish—*(We hear the sound of a train roaring by outside. She half rises in bed, in panic, glaring toward the curtains. Her movements are frenzied. She beats with her knuckles on the bed, then suddenly stops and reaches for the phone. Spotlight picks up 4TH OPERATOR, seated L.)*

OPERATOR: *(Coolly)* Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: Operator—try that Murray Hill 4-0098 number for me just once more, please.

OPERATOR: Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. *(Call goes through. We hear ringing at the other end, ring after ring.)*

MRS. STEVENSON: He's gone. Oh, Elbert, how could you? How could you? *(She hangs up, sobbing pitiingly to herself, turning restlessly. Spotlight goes out on 4TH OPERATOR.)* But I can't be alone tonight, I can't! If I'm alone one more second—*(She runs her hands wildly through her hair.)* I don't care what he says, or what the expense is, I'm a sick woman—I'm entitled! *(With trembling fingers she picks up the receiver again and dials Information. The spotlight picks up INFORMATION OPERATOR, seated R.)*

INFORMATION: This is Information.

MRS. STEVENSON: I want the telephone number of Henschley Hospital.

INFORMATION: Henschley Hospital? Do you have the address, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: No. It's somewhere in the Seventies. It's a small, private, and exclusive hospital where I had my appendix out two years ago. Henschley. H-E-N-C—

INFORMATION: One moment, please.

MRS. STEVENSON: Please—hurry. And please—what's the time?

INFORMATION: I don't know, madam. You may find out the time by dialing Meridan 7-1212.

MRS. STEVENSON: *(Irritated)* Oh, for heaven's sake, couldn't you—?

INFORMATION: The number of Henschley Hospital is Butterfield 7-0105, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON: Butterfield 7-0105. *(She hangs up before she fin-*

ishes speaking and immediately dials the number as she repeats it. Spotlight goes out on INFORMATION. Phone rings. Spotlight picks up WOMAN in nurse's uniform, seated at desk L.)

WOMAN: (*Middle-aged, solid, firm, practical*) Henschley Hospital, good evening.

MRS. STEVENSON: Nurses' Registry.

WOMAN: Who was it you wished to speak to, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*High-handed*) I want the Nurses' Registry at once. I want a trained nurse. I want to hire her immediately. For the night.

WOMAN: I see. And what is the nature of the case, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: Nerves. I'm very nervous. I need soothing—and companionship. My husband is away and I'm—

WOMAN: Have you been recommended to us by any doctor in particular, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: No. But I really don't see why all this catechizing is necessary. I want a trained nurse. I was a patient in your hospital two years ago. And, after all, I *do* expect to pay this person—

WOMAN: We quite understand that, madam. But registered nurses are very scarce just now and our superintendent has asked us to send people out only on cases where the physician in charge feels it is absolutely necessary.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Growing hysterical*) Well, it *is* absolutely necessary! I'm a sick woman. I'm very upset! Very! I'm alone in this house—and I'm an invalid—and tonight I overheard a telephone conversation that upset me dreadfully. About a murder—a poor woman who was going to be murdered at eleven-fifteen tonight. In fact, if someone doesn't come at once, I'm afraid I'll go out of my mind!

WOMAN: (*Calmly*) I see. Well, I'll speak to Miss Phillips as soon as she comes in. And what is your name, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: When do you expect Miss Phillips in?

WOMAN: I really don't know, madam. She went out to supper at eleven o'clock.

MRS. STEVENSON: Eleven o'clock. But it's not eleven yet. (*She cries out.*) Oh, my clock *has* stopped. I *thought* it was running down. What time is it? (*WOMAN glances at wristwatch.*)

WOMAN: Just fourteen minutes past eleven. (*Sound of phone receiver being lifted on same line as MRS. STEVENSON's. A click.*)

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Crying out*) What's *that*?

WOMAN: What was what, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: That—that click just now—in my own telephone? As though someone had lifted the receiver off the hook of the extension phone downstairs.

WOMAN: I didn't hear it, madam. Now, about this—

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Scared*) But I *did*. There's someone in this house! Someone downstairs in the kitchen! And they're listening to me now—they're— (*She puts hand over her mouth, hangs up the phone, and sits in terror, frozen, listening.*) I won't pick it up, I won't let them hear me. I'll be quiet—and they'll think— (*With growing terror*) But if I don't call someone now while they're still down there, there'll be no time! (*She picks up the receiver. There is a bland, buzzing signal. She dials the operator. On the second ring, spotlight goes on R. We see 5TH OPERATOR.*)

OPERATOR: (*Fat and lethargic*) Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*A desperate whisper*) Operator—I—I'm in desperate trouble—

OPERATOR: I cannot hear you, madam. Please speak louder.

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Still whispering*) I don't dare. I—there's someone listening. Can you hear me now?

OPERATOR: Your call, please? What number are you calling, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON: (*Desperately*) You've got to hear me! Oh, please! You've got to help me! There's someone in this house—someone who's going to murder me! And you've got to get in touch with the— (*Click of receiver being put down on MRS. STEVENSON's line. She bursts out wildly.*) Oh—there it is—he's put it down! He's coming! (*She screams.*) He's coming up the stairs! (*She thrashes in the bed. The phone cord catching in the lamp wire, the lamp topples, goes out. Darkness. Hoarsely.*) Give me the Police Department. (*We see on the dark C. stage the shadow of the door opening. MRS. STEVENSON screams.*) The police! (*On stage, there is the swift rush of a shadow advancing to the bed—the sound of her voice is choked out as*)

OPERATOR: Ringing the Police Department. (*Phone is rung. We hear the sound of a train beginning to fade in. On the second ring, MRS. STEVENSON screams again, but the roaring of the train drowns out her voice. For a few seconds we hear nothing but the roaring of the train, then, dying away, the phone at Police Headquarters ringing. Spotlight goes on DUFFY, L. stage.*)

DUFFY: Police Department. Precinct 43. Duffy speaking. (*Pause. Nothing visible but darkness on C. stage.*) Police Department.

Duffy speaking. *(Now a flashlight goes on, illuminating the open phone to one side of MRS. STEVENSON's bed. Nearby, hanging down, is her lifeless hand. We see the second man, GEORGE, in black gloves, reach down and pick up the phone. He is breathing hard.)*

GEORGE: Sorry, wrong number. *(He replaces the receiver on the hook quietly and exits as DUFFY hangs up with a shrug and the curtain falls.)*



John Collier

Back for Christmas

"**D**octor," said Major Sinclair, "we certainly must have you with us for Christmas." It was afternoon and the Carpenters' living room was filled with friends who had come to say last-minute farewells to the doctor and his wife.

"He shall be back," said Mrs. Carpenter. "I promise you."

"It's hardly certain," said Dr. Carpenter. "I'd like nothing better."

"After all," said Mr. Hewitt, "you've contracted to lecture only for three months."

"Anything may happen," said Dr. Carpenter.

"Whatever happens," said Mrs. Carpenter, beaming at them, "he shall be back in England for Christmas. You may all believe me."

They all believed her. The doctor himself almost believed her. For ten years she had been promising him for dinner parties, garden parties, committees, heaven knows what, and the promises had always been kept.

The farewells began. There was a fluting of compliments on dear Hermione's marvelous arrangements. She and her husband would drive to Southampton that evening. They would embark the following day. No trains, no bustle, no last-minute worries. Certainly the doctor was marvelously looked after. He would be a great success in America. Especially with Hermione to see to everything. She would have a wonderful time, too. She would see the skyscrapers. Nothing like that in Little Godwearing. But she must be very sure to bring him back.

"Yes, I will bring him back. You may rely upon it." He mustn't be persuaded. No extensions. No wonderful post at some super-American hospital. Our infirmary needs him. And he must be back by Christmas. "Yes," Mrs. Carpenter called to the last departing guest, "I shall see to it. He shall be back by Christmas."

The final arrangements for closing the house were very well managed. The maids soon had the tea things washed up; they came in, said goodbye, and were in time to catch the afternoon bus to Devizes.

Nothing remained but odds and ends, locking doors, seeing that everything was tidy. "Go upstairs," said Hermione, "and change into

your brown tweeds. Empty the pockets of that suit before you put it in your bag. I'll see to everything else. All you have to do is not to get in the way."

The doctor went upstairs and took off the suit he was wearing, but instead of the brown tweeds he put on an old, dirty bath gown, which he took from the back of his wardrobe. Then, after making one or two little arrangements, he leaned over the head of the stairs and called to his wife, "Hermione! Have you a moment to spare?"

"Of course, dear. I'm just finished."

"Just come up here for a moment. There's something rather extraordinary up here."

Hermione immediately came up. "Good heavens, my dear man!" she said when she saw her husband. "What are you lounging about in that filthy old thing for? I told you to have it burned long ago."

"Who in the world," said the doctor, "has dropped a gold chain down the bathtub drain?"

"Nobody has, of course," said Hermione. "Nobody wears such a thing."

"Then what is it doing there?" said the doctor. "Take this flashlight. If you lean right over, you can see it shining, deep down."

"Some Woolworth's bangle off one of the maids," said Hermione. "It can be nothing else." However, she took the flashlight and leaned over, squinting into the drain. The doctor, raising a short length of lead pipe, struck three times with great force and precision, and, tilting the body by the knees, tumbled it into the tub.

He then slipped off the bathrobe and, standing completely naked, unwrapped a towel full of implements and put them into the washbasin. He spread several sheets of newspaper on the floor and turned once more to his victim.

She was dead, of course—horribly doubled up, like a somersaulter, at one end of the tub. He stood looking at her for a very long time, thinking of absolutely nothing at all. Then he saw how much blood there was and his mind began to move again.

First he pushed and pulled until she lay straight in the bath, then he removed her clothing. In a narrow bathtub this was an extremely clumsy business, but he managed it at last and then turned on the taps. The water rushed into the tub, then dwindled, then died away, and the last of it gurgled down the drain.

"Good God!" he said. "She turned it off at the main."

There was only one thing to do: the doctor hastily wiped his hands on a towel, opened the bathroom door with a clean corner of the

towel, threw it back onto the bath stool, and ran downstairs, barefoot, light as a cat. The cellar door was in a corner of the entrance hall, under the stairs. He knew just where the cut-off was. He had reason to: he had been pottering about down there for some time past—trying to scrape out a bin for wine, he had told Hermione. He pushed open the cellar door, went down the steep steps, and just before the closing door plunged the cellar into pitch darkness he put his hand on the tap and turned it on. Then he felt his way back along the grimy wall till he came to the steps. He was about to ascend them when the bell rang.

The doctor was scarcely aware of the ringing as a sound. It was like a spike of iron pushed slowly up through his stomach. It went on until it reached his brain. Then something broke. He threw himself down in the coal dust on the floor and said, "I'm through. I'm through. They've got no right to come. Fools!" Then he heard himself panting. "None of this," he said to himself. "None of this."

He began to revive. He got to his feet, and when the bell rang again the sound passed through him almost painlessly. "Let them go away," he said. Then he heard the front door open. He said, "I don't care." His shoulder came up, like that of a boxer, to shield his face. "I give up," he said.

He heard people calling. "Herbert!" "Hermione!" The Wallingfords.

"Damn them! They come butting in. People anxious to get off. All naked! And blood and coal dust! I'm through! I can't do it!"

"Herbert!"

"Hermione!"

"Where the dickens can they be?"

"The car's there."

"Maybe they've popped round to Mrs. Liddell's."

"We must see them."

"Or to the shops, maybe. Something at the last minute."

"Not Hermione. I say, listen! Isn't that someone having a bath? Shall I shout? What about whanging on the door?"

"Shhh! Don't. It might not be tactful."

"No harm in a shout."

"Look, dear. Let's come in on our way back. Hermione said they wouldn't be leaving before seven. They're dining on the way, in Salisbury."

"Think so? All right. Only I want a last drink with old Herbert. He'd be hurt."

"Let's hurry. We can be back by half past six."

The doctor heard them walk out and the front door close quietly behind them. He thought, Half past six. I can do it.

He crossed the hall, sprang the latch on the front door, went upstairs, and, taking his instruments from the wash-basin, finished what he had to do. He came down again, clad in his bath gown, carrying parcel after parcel of toweling or newspaper neatly secured with safety-pins. These he packed carefully into the narrow, deep hole he had made in the corner of the cellar, shoveled in the soil, spread coal dust over all, satisfied himself that everything was in order, and went upstairs again. He then thoroughly cleansed the bath, and himself, and the bath again, dressed, and took his wife's clothing and his bath gown to the incinerator.

One or two more little touches and everything was in order. It was only a quarter past six. The Wallingfords were always late; he had only to get into the car and drive off. It was a pity he couldn't wait till after dusk, but he could make a detour to avoid passing through the main street, and even if he was seen driving alone people would only think Hermione had gone on ahead for some reason and they would forget about it.

Still, he was glad when he had finally got away, entirely unobserved, on the open road, driving into the gathering dusk. He had to drive very carefully; he found himself unable to judge distances; his reactions were abnormally delayed, but that was a detail. When it was quite dark he allowed himself to stop the car on the top of the downs, in order to think.

The stars were superb. He could see the lights of one or two little towns far away on the plain below him. He was exultant. Everything that was to follow was perfectly simple. Marion was waiting in Chicago. She already believed him to be a widower. The lecture people could be put off with a word. He had nothing to do but establish himself in some thriving out-of-the-way town in America and he was safe forever.

There were Hermione's clothes, of course, in the suitcases: they could be disposed of through the porthole. Thank heaven she wrote her letters on the typewriter—a little thing like handwriting might have prevented everything. "But there you are," he said. "She was up-to-date, efficient all along the line. Managed everything. Managed herself to death, damn her!"

There's no reason to get excited, he thought. I'll write a few letters for her, then fewer and fewer. Write myself—always expecting to

get back, never quite able to. Keep the house one year, then another, then another; they'll get used to it. Might even come back along in a year or two and clear it up properly. Nothing easier. But not for Christmas!

He started up the engine and was off.

In New York he felt free at last, really free. He was safe. He could look back with pleasure—at least, after a meal, lighting his cigarette, he could look back with a sort of pleasure—to the minute he had passed in the cellar listening to the bell, the door, and the voices. He could look forward to Marion.

As he strolled through the lobby of his hotel, the clerk, smiling, held up letters for him. It was the first batch from England. Well, what did that matter? It would be fun dashing off the typewritten sheets in Hermione's downright style, signing them with her squiggle, telling everyone what a success his first lecture had been, how thrilled he was with America but how certainly she'd bring him back for Christmas. Doubts could creep in later.

He glanced over the letters. Most were for Hermione. From the Sinclairs, the Wallingfords, the vicar, and a business letter from Holt & Sons, Builders and Decorators.

He stood in the lounge, people brushing by him. He opened the letters with his thumb, reading here and there, smiling. They all seemed very confident he would be back for Christmas. They relied on Hermione. "That's where they make their big mistake," said the doctor, who had taken to American phrases. The builder's letter he kept to the last. Some bill, probably.

It was.

Dear Madam,

We are in receipt of your kind acceptance of estimate as below, and also a key.

We beg to repeat you may have every confidence in same being ready in ample time for Christmas present as stated. We are setting men to work this week.

We are, Madam, yours faithfully,

PAUL HOLT & SONS

To excavating, building up, suitably lining one sunken wine bin in cellar as indicated, using best materials, making good, etc.,

£38/0/0.

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole

At six o'clock of a January evening Mr. Whybrow was walking home through the cobweb alleys of London's East End. He had left the golden clamor of the great High Street, to which the tram had brought him from the river and his daily work, and was now in the chessboard of byways that is called Mallon End. None of the rush and gleam of the High Street trickled into these byways. A few paces south—a floodtide of life, foaming and beating. Here—only slow-shuffling figures and muffled pulses. He was in the sink of London, the last refuge of European vagrants.

As though in tune with the street's spirit, he, too, walked slowly, with head down. It seemed that he was pondering some pressing trouble, but he was not. He had no trouble. He was walking slowly because he had been on his feet all day, and he was bent in abstraction because he was wondering whether the Missis would have herrings for his tea or haddock, and he was trying to decide which would be the more tasty on a night like this.

A wretched night it was, of damp and mist, and the mist wandered into his throat and his eyes, and the damp had settled on pavement and roadway, and where the sparse lamplight fell it sent up a greasy sparkle that chilled one to look at. By contrast, it made his speculations more agreeable, and made him ready for that tea—whether herring or haddock.

His eye turned from the glum bricks that made his horizon and went forward half a mile. He saw a gas-lit kitchen, a flamy fire, and a spread teatable. There was toast in the hearth and a singing kettle on the side and a piquant effusion of herrings, or maybe of haddock, or perhaps sausages. The vision gave his aching feet a throb of energy. He shook imperceptible damp from his shoulders and hastened toward its reality.

But Mr. Whybrow wasn't going to get any tea that evening—or any other evening. Mr. Whybrow was going to die. Somewhere within a hundred yards of him another man was walking: a man much like Mr. Whybrow and much like any other man, but without the only quality that enables mankind to live peaceably together and not as madmen in a jungle—a man with a dead heart eating

into itself and bringing forth the foul organisms that arise from death and corruption. And that thing in man's shape, on a whim or a settled idea—one cannot know—had said within himself that Mr. Whybrow should never taste another herring.

Not that Mr. Whybrow had injured him. Not that he had any dislike of Mr. Whybrow. Indeed, he knew nothing of him save as a familiar figure about the streets. But, moved by a force that had taken possession of his empty cells, he had picked on Mr. Whybrow with that blind choice that makes us pick one restaurant table that has nothing to mark it from four or five other tables, or one apple from a dish of half a dozen equal apples; or that drives Nature to send a cyclone upon one corner of this planet, and destroy five hundred lives in that corner and leave another five hundred in the same corner unharmed.

So this man had picked on Mr. Whybrow as he might have picked on you or me had we been within his daily observation, and even now he was creeping through the blue-toned streets, nursing his large white hands, moving ever closer to Mr. Whybrow's teatable, and so closer to Mr. Whybrow himself.

He wasn't, this man, a bad man. Indeed, he had many of the social and amiable qualities and passed as a respectable man, as most successful criminals do. But the thought had come into his moldering mind that he would like to murder somebody, and as he held no fear of God or man he was going to do it, and would then go home to *his* tea. I don't say that flippantly, but as a statement of fact.

Strange as it may seem to the humane, murderers must and do sit down to meals after a murder. There is no reason why they shouldn't, and many reasons why they should. For one thing, they need to keep their physical and mental vitality at full beat for the business of covering their crime. For another, the strain of their effort makes them hungry, and satisfaction at the accomplishment of a desired thing brings a feeling of relaxation toward human pleasures. It is accepted among non-murderers that the murderer is always overcome by fear for his safety and horror at his act—but this type is rare. His own safety is, of course, his immediate concern, but vanity is a marked quality of most murderers—and that, together with the thrill of conquest, makes him confident that he can secure it, and when he has restored his strength with food he goes about securing it as a young hostess goes about the arranging of her first big dinner—a little anxious, but no more. Criminologists and detectives tell us that *every* murderer, however intelligent or cunning,

always makes one slip in his tactics—one little slip that brings the affair home to him. But that is only half true. It is true only of the murderers who are caught. Scores of murderers are not caught: therefore scores of murderers do not make any mistake at all. This man didn't.

As for horror or remorse, prison chaplains, doctors, and lawyers have told us that of murderers they have interviewed under condemnation and the shadow of death, only one here and there has expressed any contrition for his act or shown any sign of mental misery. Most of them display only exasperation at having been caught when so many have gone undiscovered—or indignation at being condemned for a perfectly reasonable act. However normal and humane they may have been before the murder, they are utterly without conscience after it.

For what is conscience? Simply a polite nickname for superstition, which is a polite nickname for fear. Those who associate remorse with murder are, no doubt, basing their ideas on the world legend of the remorse of Cain or are projecting their own frail minds into the mind of the murderer and getting false reactions. Peaceable folk cannot hope to make contact with this mind, for they are not merely different in mental type from the murderer, they are different in their personal chemistry and construction. Some men can and do kill, not one man, but two or three, and go calmly about their daily affairs. Other men could not, under the most agonizing provocation, bring themselves even to wound. It is men of this sort who imagine the murderer in torments of remorse and fear of the law, whereas he is actually sitting down to his tea.

The man with the large white hands was as ready for his tea as Mr. Whybrow was, but he had something to do before he went to it. When he had done that something, and made no mistake about it, he would be even more ready for it, and would go to it as comfortably as he went to it the day before, when his hands were stainless.

Walk on, then, Mr. Whybrow, walk on; and as you walk, look your last upon the familiar features of your nightly journey. Follow your jack-o'-lantern tea table. Look well upon its warmth and color and kindness, feed your eyes with it and tease your nose with its gentle domestic odors, for you will never sit down to it. Within ten minutes' pacing of you a pursuing phantom has spoken in his heart, and you are doomed. There you go—you and phantom—two nebulous dabs of mortality, moving through green air along pavements of powder blue, the one to kill, the other to be killed. Walk on. Don't annoy

your burning feet by hurrying, for the more slowly you walk, the longer you will breathe the green air of this January dusk, and see the dreamy lamplight and the little shops, and hear the agreeable commerce of the London crowd and the haunting pathos of the street organ. These things are dear to you, Mr. Whybrow. You don't know it now, but in fifteen minutes you will have two seconds in which to realize how inexpressibly dear they are.

Walk on, then, across this crazy chessboard. You are in Lagos Street now, among the tents of the wanderers of Eastern Europe. A minute or so and you are in Loyal Lane, among the lodging houses that shelter the useless and the beaten of London's camp followers. The lane holds the smell of them, and its soft darkness seems heavy with the wail of the futile. But you are not sensitive to impalpable things and you plod through it, unseeing, as you do every evening, and come to Blean Street, and plod through that.

From basement to sky rise the tenements of an alien colony. Their windows slot the ebony of their walls with lemon. Behind those windows strange life is moving, dressed with forms that are not of London or of England, yet in essence the same agreeable life that you have been living and tonight will live no more. From high above you comes a voice crooning "The Song of Katta." Through a window you see a family keeping a religious rite. Through another you see a woman pouring out tea for her husband. You see a man mending a pair of boots, a mother bathing her baby. You have seen all these things before and never noticed them. You do not notice them now, but if you knew that you were never going to see them again, you would notice them. You never *will* see them again, not because your life has run its natural course, but because a man you have often passed in the street has at his own solitary pleasure decided to usurp the awful authority of nature and destroy you. So perhaps it's as well that you don't notice them, for your part in them is ended. No more for you these pretty moments of our earthly travail: only one moment of terror, and then a plunging darkness.

Closer to you this shadow of massacre moves, and now he is twenty yards behind you. You can hear his footfall, but you do not turn your head. You are familiar with footfalls. You are in London, in the easy security of your daily territory, and footfalls behind you, your instinct tells you, are no more than a message of human company.

But can't you hear something in those footfalls—something that goes with a widdershins beat? Something that says: *Look out, look*

out. Beware, beware. Can't you hear the very syllables of *mur-der-er, mur-der-er*? No—there is nothing in footfalls. They are neutral. The foot of villainy falls with the same quiet note as the foot of honesty. But those footfalls, Mr. Whybrow, are bearing on to you a pair of hands, and there is something in hands. Behind you that pair of hands is even now stretching its muscles in preparation for your end. Every minute of your days you have been seeing human hands. Have you ever realized the sheer horror of hands—those appendages that are a symbol for our moments of trust and affection and salutation? Have you thought of the sickening potentialities that lie within the scope of that five-tentacled member? No, you never have—for all the human hands you have seen have been stretched to you in kindness or fellowship. Yet, though the eyes can hate and the lips can sting, it is only that dangling member that can gather the accumulated essence of evil and electrify it into currents of destruction. Satan may enter into man by many doors, but in the hands alone can he find the servants of his will.

Another minute, Mr. Whybrow, and you will know all about the horror of human hands.

You are nearly home now. You have turned into your street—Caspar Street—and you are in the center of the chessboard. You can see the front window of your little four-roomed house. The street is dark, and its three lamps give only a smut of light that is more confusing than darkness. It is dark—empty, too. Nobody about—no lights in the front parlors of the houses, for the families are at tea in their kitchens, and only a random glow in a few upper rooms occupied by lodgers. Nobody about but you and your following companion, and you don't notice him. You see him so often that he is never seen. Even if you turned your head and saw him, you would only say good evening to him and walk on. A suggestion that he was a possible murderer would not even make you laugh. It would be too silly.

And now you are at your gate. And now you have found your door key. And now you are in, and hanging up your hat and coat. The Missis has just called a greeting from the kitchen, whose smell is an echo of that greeting (herrings!), and you have answered it when the door shakes under a sharp knock.

Go away, Mr. Whybrow. Go away from that door. Don't touch it. Get right away from it. Get out of the house. Run with the Missis to the back garden, and over the fence. Or call the neighbors. But don't touch that door. Don't, Mr. Whybrow, don't open—

Mr. Whybrow opened the door . . .

That was the beginning of what became known as London's Strangling Horrors. Horrors they were called because they were something more than murders: they were motiveless, and there was an air of black magic about them. Each murder was committed at a time when the street where the bodies were found was empty of any perceptible or possible murderer. There would be an empty alley. There would be a policeman at its end. He would turn his back on the empty alley for less than a minute, then he would look round and run into the night with news of another strangling—and in any direction he looked nobody to be seen and no report to be had of anybody being seen. Or he would be on duty in a long-quiet street and suddenly be called to a house of dead people whom a few seconds earlier he had seen alive—and, again, whichever way he looked nobody to be seen, and although police whistles put an immediate cordon around the area and searched all houses no possible murderer to be found.

The first news of the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Whybrow was brought by the station sergeant. He had been walking through Caspar Street on his way to the station for duty when he noticed the open door of No. 98. Glancing in, he saw by the gaslight of the passage a motionless body on the floor. After a second look, he blew his whistle, and when the constables answered him he took one to join him in a search of the house and sent others to watch all neighboring streets and make inquiries at adjoining houses.

But neither in the house nor in the streets was anything found to indicate the murderer. Neighbors on either side and opposite were questioned, but they had seen nobody about and had heard nothing. One had heard Mr. Whybrow come home—the scrape of his latchkey in the door was so regular an evening sound, he said, that you could set your watch by it for half past six—but he had heard nothing more than the sound of the opening door until the sergeant's whistle. Nobody had been seen to enter the house or leave it, by front or back, and the necks of the dead people carried no fingerprints or other traces.

A nephew was called in to go over the house, but he could find nothing missing—and, anyway, his uncle possessed nothing worth stealing. The little money in the house was untouched and there were no signs of any disturbance of the property, or even of struggle. No signs of anything but brutal and wanton murder.

Mr. Whybrow was known to neighbors and workmates as a quiet, likeable, home-loving man—such a man as could not have any ene-

mies. But, then, murdered men seldom have. A relentless enemy who hates a man to the point of wanting to hurt him seldom wants to murder him, since to do that puts him beyond suffering. So the police were left with an impossible situation: no clue to the murderer and no motive for the murders—only the fact that they had been done.

The first news of the affair sent a tremor through London generally, and an electric thrill through all Mallon End. Here was a murder of two inoffensive people, not for gain and not for revenge, and the murderer, to whom apparently killing was a casual impulse, was at large. He had left no traces and, provided he had no companions, there seemed no reason why he should not remain at large. Any clear-headed man who stands alone, and has no fear of God or man, can, if he chooses, hold a city, even a nation, in subjection—but your everyday criminal is seldom clear-headed, and dislikes being lonely. He needs, if not the support of confederates, at least somebody to talk to. His vanity needs the satisfaction of perceiving at first hand the effect of his work. For this he will frequent bars and coffee shops and other public places. Then, sooner or later, in a glow of comradeship, he will utter the one word too much and the mark, who is everywhere, has an easy job.

But though the doss houses and saloons and other places were combed and set with watches, it was made known by whispers that good money and protection were assured to those with information, nothing attaching to the Whybrow case could be found. The murderer clearly had no friends and kept no company. Known men of this type were called up and questioned, but each was able to give a good account of himself, and in a few days the police were at a dead end. Against the constant public gibe that the thing had been done almost under their noses, they became restive and for four days each man of the force was working his daily beat under a strain. On the fifth day, they became still more restive.

It was the season of annual teas and entertainments for the children of the Sunday Schools, and on an evening of fog, when London was a world of groping phantoms, a small girl, in the bravery of best Sunday frock and shoes, shining face, and new-washed hair, set out from Logan Passage for St. Michael's Parish Hall. She never got there. She was not actually dead until half past six, but she was as good as dead from the moment she left her mother's door. Somebody

like a man pacing the street from which the Passage led saw her come out, and from that moment she was dead. Through the fog, somebody's large white hands reached after her and in fifteen minutes they were about her.

At half past six, a whistle screamed trouble, and those answering it found the body of little Nellie Vrinoff in a warehouse entry in Minnow Street. The sergeant was first among them, and he posted his men to useful points, ordering them here and there in the tart tones of repressed rage, and berating the officer whose beat the street was.

"I saw you, Magson, at the end of the lane. You were there ten minutes before you turned." Magson began an explanation about keeping an eye on a suspicious-looking character at that end, but the sergeant cut him short. "Suspicious characters be damned. You don't want to look for suspicious characters. You want to look for *murderers*. Messing about. And then this happens right where you ought to be. *Now* think what they'll say."

With the speed of ill news came the crowd, pale and perturbed, and on the story that the unknown monster had appeared again, and this time to a child, their faces streaked the fog with spots of hate and horror. But then came the ambulance and more police, and swiftly they broke up the crowd—and as it broke, the sergeant's thought was thickened into words and from all sides came low murmurs of "right under their noses!"

Later inquiries showed that four people of the district, above suspicion, had passed that entry at intervals of seconds before the murder and seen nothing and heard nothing. None of them had passed the child alive or seen her dead. None of them had seen anybody in the street except themselves. Again the police were left with no motive and with no clue.

And now the district, as you will remember, was given over, not to panic, for the London public never yields to that, but to apprehension and dismay. If these things were happening in their familiar streets, then anything might happen. Wherever people met—in the streets, the markets, and the shops—they debated the one topic. Women took to bolting their windows and doors at the first fall of dusk. They kept their children closely under their eye. They did their shopping before dark and watched anxiously, while pretending they weren't watching, for the return of their husbands from work. Under the Cockney's semi-humorous resignation to disaster, they hid an hourly foreboding. By the whim of one man with a pair of

hands, the structure and tenor of their daily life were shaken, as they always can be shaken by any man contemptuous of humanity and fearless of its laws.

They began to realize that the pillars that supported the peaceable society in which they lived were mere straws that anybody could snap—that laws were powerful only so long as they were obeyed, that the police were potent only so long as they were feared. By the power of his hands this one man had made a whole community do something new: he had made it think, and had left it gasping at the obvious.

And then, while it was yet gasping under his two strokes, he made his third. Conscious of the horror that his hands had created, and hungry as an actor who has once tasted the thrill of the multitude, he made fresh advertisement of his presence—and on Wednesday morning, three days after the murder of the child, the papers carried to the breakfast tables of England the story of a still more shocking outrage.

At 9:32 on Tuesday night, a constable was on duty in Jarnigan Road and at that time spoke to a fellow officer named Petersen at the top of Clemming Street. He had seen this officer walk down that street. He could swear that the street was empty at that time, except for a lame bootblack he knew by sight, who had passed him and entered a tenement on the side opposite that on which his fellow officer was walking.

He had the habit, as all constables had just then, of looking constantly behind him and around him, whichever way he was walking, and he was certain that the street was empty. He passed his sergeant at 9:33, saluted him, and answered his inquiry for anything seen. He reported that he had seen nothing, and passed on. His beat ended a short distance from Clemming Street and, having paced it, he turned and came again, at 9:34, to the top of the street. He had scarcely reached it before he heard the hoarse cry of the sergeant: "Gregory! You there? Quick! Here's another! My God, it's Petersen! Garotted. Quick, call 'em up!"

That was the third of the Strangling Horrors, of which there were to be a fourth and a fifth—and the five horrors were to pass into the unknown and unknowable. That is, unknown as far as authority and the public were concerned. The identity of the murderer *was* known, but to two men only. One was the murderer himself. The other was a young journalist . . .

This young man, who was covering the affairs for his paper, the *Daily Torch*, was no smarter than the other zealous newspapermen who were hanging about these byways in the hope of a sudden story. But he was patient, and he hung a little closer to the case than the other fellows, and by continually staring at it he at last raised the figure of the murderer like a genie from the stones on which he had stood to do his murders.

After the first few days, the men had given up any attempt at an exclusive story, for there was none to be had. They met regularly at the police station, and what little information there was they shared. The officials were agreeable to them, but no more. The sergeant discussed with them the details of each murder, suggested possible explanations of the man's methods, recalled from the past those cases that had some similarity, on the matter of motive reminded them of the motiveless Neil Cream and the wanton John Williams, and hinted that work was being done which would soon bring the business to an end. But about that work he would not say a word.

The Inspector, too, was gracefully garrulous on the thesis of murder, but whenever one of the party edged the talk toward what was being done in this immediate matter, he glided past it. Whatever the officials knew, they were not giving it to newspaper men. The business had fallen heavily upon them, and only by a capture made by their own efforts could they rehabilitate themselves in official and public esteem. Scotland Yard, of course, was at work, and had all the station's material, but the station's hope was that they themselves would have the honor of settling the affair—and however useful the cooperation of the press might be in other cases, they did not want to risk a defeat by a premature disclosure of their theories and plans.

So the sergeant talked at large and propounded one interesting theory after another, all of which the newspapermen had thought of themselves.

The young man soon gave up these morning lectures on the philosophy of crime and took to wandering about the streets and making bright stories out of the effect of the murders on the normal life of the people—a melancholy job made more melancholy by the district. The littered roadways, the crestfallen houses, the bleared windows—all held the acid misery that evokes no sympathy: the misery of the frustrated poet. The misery was the creation of the aliens, who were living in this makeshift fashion because they had no set-

tled homes and would neither take the trouble to make a home where they *could* settle nor get on with their wandering.

There was little to be picked up. All he saw and heard were indignant faces and wild conjectures of the murderer's identity and of the secret of his trick of appearing and disappearing unseen. Since a policeman himself had fallen a victim, denunciations of the force had ceased, and the unknown was now invested with a cloak of legend. Men eyed other men, as though thinking, It might be *him*. It might be *him*. They were no longer looking for a man who had the air of a Madame Tussaud murderer—they were looking for a man, or perhaps some harridan woman, who had done these particular murders.

Their thoughts ran mainly on the foreign set. Such ruffianism could scarcely belong to England, nor could the bewildering cleverness of the thing. So they turned to Rumanian gypsies and Turkish carpet sellers. There, clearly, would be found the warm spot. These Eastern fellows—they knew all sorts of tricks and they had no real religion, nothing to hold them within bounds. Sailors returning from those parts had told tales of conjurers who made themselves invisible, and there were tales of Egyptian and Arab potions that were used for abysmally queer purposes. Perhaps it *was* possible to them—you never knew. They were so slick and cunning, and they had such gliding movements—no Englishman could melt away as they could. Almost certainly the murderer would be found to be one of that sort—with some dark trick of his own—and just because they were sure that he *was* a magician, they felt that it was useless to look for him. He was a power, able to hold them in subjection and to hold himself untouchable. Superstition, which so easily cracks the frail shell of reason, had got into them. He could do anything he chose: he would never be discovered. These two points they settled, and they went about the streets in a mood of resentful fatalism.

They talked of their ideas to the journalist in half tones, looking right and left, as though *he* might overhear them and visit them. And though all the district was thinking of him and ready to pounce upon him, yet so strongly had he worked upon them that if any man in the street—say, a small man of commonplace features and form—had cried "*I am the monster!*" would their stifled fury have broken into flood and borne him down and engulfed him? Or would they not suddenly have seen something unearthly in that everyday face and figure, something unearthly in his everyday boots, some-

thing unearthly about his hat, something that marked him as one whom none of their weapons could alarm or pierce? And would they not momentarily have fallen back from this devil, as the devil fell back from the Cross made by the sword of Faust, and so have given him time to escape? I do not know—but so fixed was their belief in his invincibility that it is at least likely that they would have made this hesitation had such an occasion arisen.

But it never did. Today this commonplace fellow, his murder-lust glutted, is still seen and observed among them as he was seen and observed all the time, but because nobody then dreamt, or now dreams, that he was what he was, they observed him then, and observe him now, as people observe a lamppost.

Almost was their belief in his invincibility justified, for five days after the murder of the policeman Petersen, when the experience and inspiration of the whole detective force of London were turned toward his identification and capture, he made his fourth and fifth strokes.

At nine o'clock that evening, the young newspaperman, who hung about every night until his paper was away, was strolling along Richards Lane. Richards Lane is a narrow street, partly a stall market and partly residential. The young man was in the residential section, which carries on one side small working-class cottages and on the other the wall of a railway goods yard. The great wall hung a blanket of shadow over the lane, and the shadow and the cadaverous outline of the now-deserted market stalls gave it the appearance of a living lane that had been turned to frost in the moment between breath and death. The very lamps that elsewhere were nimbuses of gold had here the rigidity of gems. The journalist, feeling this message of frozen eternity, was telling himself that he was tired of the whole thing when in one stroke the frost was broken. In the moment between one pace and another, silence and darkness were racked by a high scream and through the scream a voice: "Help! Help! *He's here!*"

Before he could think what movement to make, the lane came to life. As though its invisible populace had been waiting on that cry, the door of every cottage was flung open, and from them and from the alleys poured shadowy figures bent in question-mark form. For a second or so they stood as rigid as the lamps—then a police whistle gave them direction and the flock of shadows sloped up the street.

The journalist followed them, and others followed him. From the

main street and from surrounding streets they came, some risen from unfinished suppers, some disturbed in their ease of slippers and shirtsleeves, some stumbling on infirm limbs, and some upright and armed with pokers or the tools of their trade. Here and there above the wavering cloud of heads moved the bold helmets of policemen. In one dim mass they surged upon a cottage whose doorway was marked by the sergeant and two constables and voices of those behind urged them on with "Get in! Find him! Run round the back! Over the wall!" and those in front cried, "Keep back! Keep back!"

And now the fury of a mob held in thrall by unknown peril broke loose. He was there—on the spot. Surely this time he could not escape! All minds were bent upon the cottage, all energies thrust toward its doors and windows and roof, all thought was turned upon one unknown man and his extermination. So that no one man saw any other man. No man saw the narrow, packed lane and the mass of struggling shadows, and all forgot to look among themselves for the monster who never lingered upon his victims. All forgot, indeed, that they, by their mass crusade of vengeance, were affording him the perfect hiding place. They saw only the house, and they heard only the rending of woodwork and the smash of glass at back and front, and the police giving orders or crying with the chase—and they pressed on.

But they found no murderer. All they found was news of murder and a glimpse of the ambulance. And for their fury there was no other object than the police themselves, who fought against this hampering of their work.

The journalist managed to struggle through to the cottage door and to get the story from the constable stationed there. The cottage was the home of a pensioned sailor and his wife and daughter. They had been at supper and at first it appeared that some noxious gas had smitten all three in mid-action. The daughter lay dead on the hearthrug with a piece of bread and butter in her hand. The father had fallen sideways from his chair, leaving on his plate a filled spoon of rice pudding. The mother lay half under the table, her lap filled with the pieces of a broken cup and splashes of cocoa. But in three seconds the idea of gas was dismissed. One glance at their necks showed that this was the Strangler again, and the police stood and looked at the room and momentarily shared the fatalism of the public. They were helpless.

This was his fourth visit, making seven murders in all. He was

to do, as you know, one more—and to do it that night, and then he was to pass into history as the unknown London horror and return to the decent life that he had always led, remembering little of what he had done, and worried not at all by the memory.

Why did he stop? Impossible to say. Why did he begin? Impossible again. It just happened like that—and if he thinks at all of those days and nights, I surmise that he thinks of them as we think of foolish or dirty little sins that we committed in childhood. We say that they were not really sins because we were not then consciously ourselves—we had not come to realization. And we look back at that foolish little creature that we once were and forgive him because he didn't know. So, I think, with this man.

There are plenty like him. Eugene Aram, after the murder of Daniel Clarke, lived a quiet, contented life for fourteen years, unhaunted by his crime and unshaken in his self-esteem. Dr. Crippen murdered his wife, and then lived pleasantly with his mistress in the house under whose floor he had buried the wife. Constance Kent, found Not Guilty of the murder of her young brother, led a peaceful life for five years before she confessed. George Joseph Smith and William Palmer lived amiably among their fellows, untroubled by fear or by remorse for their poisonings and drownings. Charles Peace, at the time he made his one unfortunate essay, had settled down into a respectable citizen with an interest in antiques. It happened that, after a lapse of time, these men were discovered, but more murderers than we guess are living decent lives today and will die in decency, undiscovered and unsuspected. As this man will.

But he had a narrow escape, and it was perhaps this narrow escape that brought him to a stop. The escape was due to an error of judgment on the part of the journalist.

As soon as he had the full story of the affair, which took some time, he spent fifteen minutes on the telephone sending the story through, and at the end of the fifteen minutes, when the stimulus of the business had left him, he felt physically tired and mentally disheveled. He was not yet free to go home, the paper would not go away for another hour, so he turned into a bar for a drink and some sandwiches.

It was then, when he had dismissed the whole business from his mind and was looking about the bar and admiring the landlord's taste in watch chains and his air of domination, and was thinking that the landlord of a well conducted tavern had a more comfortable

life than a newspaperman, that his mind received from nowhere a spark of light.

He was not thinking about the Strangling Horrors—his mind was on his sandwich. As a public-house sandwich, it was a curiosity. The bread had been thinly cut, it was buttered, and the ham was not two months' stale, it was ham as it should be. His mind turned to the inventor of this refreshment, the Earl of Sandwich, and then to George the Fourth, and then to the Georges, and to the legend of that George who was worried to know how the apple got into the apple dumpling. He wondered whether that George would have been equally puzzled to know how the ham got into the ham sandwich, and how long it would have been before it occurred to him that the ham could not have got there unless somebody had put it there.

He got up to order another sandwich, and in that moment a little active corner of his mind settled the affair. If there was ham in his sandwich, somebody must have put it there. If seven people had been murdered, somebody must have been there to murder them. There was no aeroplane or automobile that would go into a man's pocket, therefore that somebody must have escaped either by running away or standing still. And again, therefore—

He was visualizing the front-page story that his paper would carry if his theory were correct, and if—a matter of conjecture—his editor had the necessary nerve to make a bold stroke, when a cry of "Time, gentlemen, please! All out!" reminded him of the hour.

He got up and went out into a world of mist, broken by the ragged discs of roadside puddles and the streaming lightning of motor buses. He was certain that he had *the* story, but even if it were proved he was doubtful whether the policy of his paper would permit him to print it. It had one great fault. It was truth, but it was impossible truth. It rocked the foundations of everything that newspaper readers believed and that newspaper editors helped them to believe. They might believe that Turkish carpet sellers had the gift of making themselves invisible. They would not believe this.

As it happened, they were not asked to, for the story was never written. As his paper had by now gone away, and as he was nourished by his refreshment and stimulated by his theory, he thought he might put in an extra half hour by testing that theory. So he began to look about for the man he had in mind—a man with white hair and large white hands—otherwise an everyday figure nobody would look twice at.

He wanted to spring his idea on this man without warning, and he was going to place himself within reach of a man armored in legends of dreadfulness and grue. This might appear to be an act of supreme courage—that one man, with no hope of immediate outside support, should place himself at the mercy of one who was holding a whole parish in terror—but it wasn't. He didn't think about the risk. He didn't think about his duty to his employers or loyalty to his paper. He was moved simply by an instinct to follow a story to its end.

He walked slowly from the tavern and crossed into Fingal Street, making for Deever Market, where he had hope of finding his man. But his journey was shortened. At the corner of Lotus Street he saw him—or a man who looked like him. This street was poorly lit, and he could see little of the man, but he *could* see white hands.

For some twenty paces he stalked him, then drew level with him, and at a point where the arch of a railway crossed the street he saw that this was his man.

He approached him with the current conversational phrase of the district. "Well, seen anything of the murderer?" The man stopped to look sharply at him, then, satisfied that the journalist was not the murderer, said: "Eh? No, nor's anybody else, curse it. Doubt if they ever will."

"I don't know. I've been thinking about them and I've got an idea."

"So?"

"Yes. Came to me all of a sudden. Quarter of an hour ago. And I'd felt that we'd all been blind. It's been staring us in the face."

The man turned again to look at him, and the look and the movement held suspicion of this man who seemed to know so much. "Oh? Has it? Well, why not give us the benefit of it?"

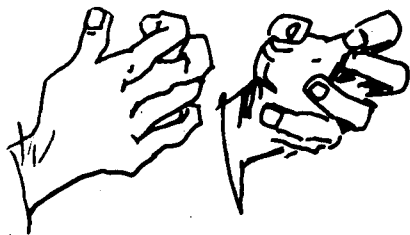
"I'm going to."

They walked level, and were nearly at the end of the little street where it meets Deever Market, when the journalist turned casually to the man and put a finger on his arm. "Yes, it seems to me quite simple now. But there's still one point I don't understand. One little thing I'd like to clear up. I mean the motive. Now, as man to man, tell me, Sergeant Ottermole, just *why* did you kill all those inoffensive people?"

The sergeant stopped, and the journalist stopped. There was just enough light from the sky, which held the reflected light of the continent of London, to give him a sight of the sergeant's face, and the sergeant's face was turned to him with a wide smile of such

urbanity and charm that the journalist's eyes were frozen as they met it.

The smile stayed for some seconds. Then said the sergeant: "Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Newspaperman, I don't know. I really don't know. In fact, I've been worried about it myself. But I've got an idea—just like you. Everybody knows that we can't control the workings of our minds, don't they? Ideas come into our minds without asking. But everybody's supposed to be able to control his body. Why? Eh? We get our minds from lord-knows-where—from people who were dead hundreds of years before we were born. Mayn't we get our bodies in the same way? Our faces, our legs, our heads—they aren't completely ours. We don't make 'em. They come to us. And couldn't ideas come into our bodies like ideas come into our minds? Eh? Can't ideas live in nerve and muscle as well as in brain? Couldn't it be that parts of our bodies aren't really us, and couldn't ideas come into those parts all of a sudden, like ideas come into—into—" he shot his arms out, showing the great white-gloved hands and hairy wrists, shot them out so swiftly to the journalist's throat that his eyes never saw them "*—into my hands!*"



Serita Deborah Stevens

Cagney & Lacey

In the locker room, Mary Beth grimaced as she adjusted the jet-black wig. "I thought you said *plainclothes*."

"Well—" Christine zipped up the miniskirt and eyed the patterned hose.

"Harve rarely sees this much cleavage." Mary Beth laughed, tugging at her sequined blouse.

Chris eyed the fringed top skeptically in the mirror. "It's all rather degrading. I can't imagine them putting a man on this detail."

Mary Beth sighed. "We might as well go to the captain's office and get this over with."

Within minutes they stood in front of Captain Wells' desk.

As if reading her mind, Wells began to placate Chris. "The John detail is very important."

"Captain—" Chris tried to be patient "—with all the heavy crime going on, we have to trap some horny bastards?"

Trying to soften Chris's remark, Mary Beth said, "She means it's a victimless crime. Look, we're good cops—"

"I know." Wells lowered his feet from the desk. "Why do you think you got promoted? That was a terrific collar you kids made last month. Like real policemen."

Mary Beth's voice was tight. "We *are* real policemen, sir."

"And we want off this cleavage detail," Chris added.

"Look, I'm gonna run it down for you." Captain Wells cleared his throat. "The approach must be explicit. Know what I mean?"

Mary Beth and Chris exchanged an amused look. They had no choice but to play along. At least for now. "Excuse me, sir, but maybe you should spell it out for us," Mary Beth suggested sweetly.

"Yeah," Chris chimed in. "She's a mother and I'm not a married woman—yet."

Wells flushed. "The John *has* to be explicit for the team to make the bust."

Christine batted her eyelashes and innocently asked, "Can you give us an example?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure." He walked around the desk. "Well, you stand there looking real provocative."

"Like this?" Chris struck a suggestive pose.

"Good. Yes. Like that. Well, then, so a John comes up to you and he'll say something like 'Are you busy?'"

They nodded, listening with rapt attention, as if this was something they had never heard before.

"You say to him, 'What do you want?' And he says—he says—"

"And he says?" Mary Beth asked.

"He says," the captain repeated, "something—explicit. You'll know it when you hear it." He cleared his throat. "Come on, I'll take you to meet the others." There was no choice except to follow.

They paused inside the doorway. The squadroom was in worse shape than Captain Wells' office. Desks were piled high with file folders containing unsolved, yet-to-be-solved, and never-in-a-million-years-to-be-solved cases.

"Can't find anything around here," an attractive young black detective complained as he searched through a pile of folders with mounting desperation.

"Men." Wells cleared his throat. "We've got two welcome new additions to the Fourteenth. This here is Lacey and Cagney."

"*Detective Cagney and Detective Lacey*," Chris corrected.

"Let me introduce you to the men." Wells pointed toward a stocky man who had just gotten off the phone. "Samuels." Motioning toward a blond officer, Wells said, "Isbecki." He pointed toward the officer who had complained about the files. "That's Petrie. You'll meet the rest of the gang later."

"Which are our desks?" Chris asked, surveying the room.

Captain Wells smiled. "Oh, we'll work out something, don't worry."

"Over there would be nice." Chris pointed to a corner, near the coffeepot.

"What?"

"She means our desks, sir," Mary Beth explained.

"Oh, yeah. Desks. Don't worry. You'll get desks, phones, the works. We're a team here—we work close."

Isbecki, his eye on Chris, said, "Yeah, we work close."

Chris froze him with an icy stare.

"I want to get something straight at the outset." Wells' tone was sharp. "We've all heard a lot about male chauvinism the last couple of years. Well, we're not gonna have any of that at the Fourteenth. Maybe there's been trouble in the other precincts, but around here

they're gonna be treated like equals." Wells slapped both women on their fannies. "Go get 'em, girls."

On Forty-seventh Street—in the diamond district—among the merchants going about their business, three prostitutes leaned against a building. Chris was one of them. A middle-aged man who had been eyeing her finally approached. "Are you busy?" he asked apprehensively.

"No," Chris responded.

"What is the, uh, tariff?"

"What do you want?"

The John looked puzzled. "What do I want?"

"Yeah, what do you want?" Chris lowered her voice seductively. "In detail."

"It's my first time. I thought you'd know. Never mind," he said. "I'd better find somebody more experienced."

In an ice-cream truck parked not far from where Chris was standing, Isbecki and Davidson heard the last of the John's conversation on the tape setup. "Did you see the legs on her?" Davidson asked.

"You're talking about a fellow officer," Isbecki said with a smile.

"I know. And I'm a married man. Gladys isn't too happy about having broads in the precinct."

"Tell her she ought to be glad it ain't you out there in mesh stockings," Isbecki retorted.

"You know the other one's married?"

"Yeah?" Davidson said, surprised. "She doesn't look it."

The subject of their conversation was standing in a doorway, doing her best to look like a prostitute. A few feet from her, wearing an abbreviated cowgirl outfit complete with rhinestone-studded vest, a black prostitute negotiating with a macho John told him to get lost and turned to another customer. Undaunted, he swaggered over to Mary Beth.

"How much?" he asked.

Assuming her best Mae West stance, Mary Beth countered with "What do you want?"

"I want you to rub peanut butter all over me. I don't want you to miss a spot."

Mary Beth tried to appear as if this was suggested to her every day. "Could you be more explicit? Tell me exactly what you want

me to do." She thrust out her chest, supposedly seductively but really for him to talk into her hidden microphone.

"I want you to—"

Suddenly Mary Beth gasped. "Hey! That's my car!" she shouted, recognizing her station wagon that had been stolen a few days before. She left the John and dashed into the middle of the street. "That's my car!" she shouted as the car turned the corner.

She ran over to the ice-cream truck parked discreetly up the street and, forgetting all her orders, she waved to the undercover detectives inside. "Follow that guy! The bum stole my car!"

Isbecki and Davidson looked at her in disbelief. "You almost had the John cold," Davidson said to her.

"Yeah," Isbecki interjected. "Now we'll never know if he wanted chunky or creamy."

Trudging back to the precinct, Mary Beth and Chris were glad the day was over. They were tired and, in Chris's case, thoroughly disgusted. As they headed toward the squadroom, Chris stopped short and grabbed Mary Beth's arm. A desk was standing in the hall. The phone, its cord extending from the detectives' room, perched precariously on the edge of the desk.

Mary Beth felt Chris's anger. "Maybe it's not one of ours."

"Right," Chris said sarcastically. "Ours are probably in the ladies' room." She hurried into the squadroom with Mary Beth right behind her.

Marcus Petrie was trying to find something in the stack of files under the window. Samuels was at his desk explaining things to Taylor and Haun. "You can't tell me it's an outside job," he was saying, "that joint is a fortress."

"A diamond broker kills another diamond broker—the ice doesn't hit the street," Taylor added.

"Twice!" Petrie chimed in.

"Yeah," said Taylor.

"So if it's not robbery, what is it?" Haun asked. He looked up as Chris and Mary Beth came toward them. "Downstairs, girls."

"Detectives Cagney and Lacey," Petrie interjected. "Meet Taylor and Haun."

"Welcome to the Fourteenth." The men smiled.

"Excuse me," Chris said to anyone who would listen, "we can't work in the hall." She pointed toward the coffeepot. "Why don't you put the desk over there?"

"Please." Petrie touched her shoulder. "I'm trying to organize this room. We can't move anything until all the files are organized. Then I'm sure we can arrange something."

Chris glared at him.

Mary Beth asked, "Which of you guys wore these frills before we came on the scene?"

The men exchanged looks.

"There wasn't a John detail before we came on, right?" Chris asked.

Samuels stood up and reached for his hat. "Petrie, let's get out of here."

"I can't until I finish—"

"Petrie, it's a murder. Let's get on it."

"Sure thing." Petrie closed the file drawer.

As Samuels went past her, Chris asked, "Is it the same MO?"

Samuels stared at her as if not comprehending.

"Was the murder the same?" Chris repeated. "You know, the Friedlander case—that other diamond merchant. You never broke that case, did you?"

"It was the same MO." Samuels bristled, looking her in the eye. "Your mascara is running," he said, and left.

Once in the locker room, Chris let loose. "Damn, but he makes me angry!"

Knowing her partner, Mary Beth's tone was firm. "Christine, let it be."

"It's been eight months since that *first* guy was killed. Samuels doesn't have the brains he was born with!"

"You keep out of it, Chris. They'll put us on some real stuff after we've been here a while."

"Okay. Okay." Christine put on some fresh lipstick. "Lighten up, Mary Beth. Say hi to Harvey."

Mary Beth grinned. "I'll give him your best."

The lights in most of the station offices had been turned off. Day officers were leaving, night shift was coming on. One light remained in the detectives' offices. Sitting at one of the desks, Christine drank coffee as she absorbed the contents of the Friedlander file. Concentrating hard, she neither heard the footsteps nor saw Marcus Petrie come in with an armload of files. Only after she felt his eyes on her did she look up.

She forced a smile, closed the file, and grabbed her coat. "Date canceled out on me—had nothing else to do."

Petrie said nothing.

Flushing, Chris rose and, with one last glance at him, hurried from the building.

Mary Beth aimed at the target and cursed. She hated firearms practice, especially when she had something on her mind. Glancing at her partner in the other booth, she said, "You know, Chris, I wouldn't blame Petrie if he told on you. You had no business being there in the first place."

Chris's back stiffened. "What I do on my own time is my business."

"Yeah, well, not when it makes the both of us look bad." Looking at the target, Mary Beth saw she was way off. "You'll only get their backs up and then where'll we be?"

"They won't give us a chance to prove we can do the job. We've got to show them or we'll be stuck on this damn John detail forever!" As if to punctuate her anger, she fired four times in succession, hitting the heart of the target each time.

Mary Beth sighed, upset at her own inability to shoot properly. "They're only testing us. It's natural. We're the first women detectives in the precinct. Can you imagine what Petrie must have gone through?"

Chris's tone was acid. "Well, it sure didn't raise his consciousness." Once more she aimed and fired, hitting the center dead-on.

"Chris, it's their case. They've been working at it for a year. They don't want to hear from you about it."

"So I should just keep smiling and take it. Like you. I bet you even smile in your sleep." Even as she said the words, Chris was sorry she'd said them.

Back on the street in their spiked heels, standing provocatively against the wall, Chris was bored. She glanced at the black prostitute in the cowgirl outfit and eyed the man coming up to her. The prostitute stepped in front of him. "Black is beautiful, don't you know that, sweetie?" She smiled at the man.

Reacting to the invitation, he smiled uncomfortably at the prostitute. "I'm sorry, I was going to talk to the blonde over there," he said, indicating Chris.

"Whatsamatter? You got something against blacks?"

"Oh, I hope you don't think that was the reason. It wasn't at all. It was her legs. Not that yours aren't terrific."

Chris moved closer to the John. "Just tell me what you want."

The prostitute sidled up to him. "You don't have to tell *me* what you want, honey. I *know* what you want."

"Bug off," Chris said, elbowing the prostitute away.

"Uh, ladies, I'm on my lunch hour." The nervous John shifted his feet.

"I'll have you back at your desk in twenty minutes—and you'll be *smiling*," the prostitute claimed.

Pointing toward Chris, he said, "It's the legs. Try to understand."

As he took another step in Chris's direction, the prostitute became ugly. "We don't like independent agents around here." She grabbed Chris's hair. "On this corner, you work for Sugar or you don't work."

"Let go of me," Chris demanded. Without using any of her martial arts, so that she wouldn't blow her cover, she tried to break the other woman's grip.

Scared, the John took off and left the two women fighting.

"Look," said Chris, trying to keep her cool, "what's your name, sister?"

"Name's Female—rhymes with tamale. Female Hudson."

"How'd you get a name like Female?"

Female snorted. "How'd you think I'd get a name like that? My mother had nine girls. When I came round, she ran out of names, so they took it off the birth certificate."

Chris took a deep breath. "Let's call it quits. I'm leaving." She had to get off this detail, and soon.

Female nursed her sore wrist and glared as Chris strode away.

Back in street clothes, Chris reported to Captain Wells. Ineffectively, she tried to explain her position.

"Look," Wells said, "the name of the game is statistics. You make your collars, you get your promotion. It's as simple as that."

Trying to quell her anger, Chris's voice was sharp. "Those streets are full of *real* crime."

"And there aren't enough policemen to solve one tenth of them. The commissioner wants those women off the street. You're a cop, you do your job."

Returning to her desk, Chris sat down hard. Then, hearing conversation coming from the office, she was glad the desk was out in the hall where she could eavesdrop without appearing to.

"Sitting *shivah*!" Samuels bellowed. "We've got a murder to solve and she's sitting shivah! Who sits shivah any more?"

"No one on a Hundred and thirty-fifth," Petrie said.

Samuels was surprised. "You know what it is?"

"If he's an Orthodox Jew, it's seven days."

Sitting at her desk, Chris listened to the conversation. As Samuels started out of the office, Chris took out her mirror and pretended to be fixing her lipstick. As soon as he had gone, she went into the squadroom. "Uh, I never thanked you for covering for me that day," she told Petrie.

Marcus glanced at her. "You're welcome."

Chris sat down on his desk, crossing her legs. "You know, you're really a fountain of information."

"I know." Marcus narrowed his eyes. "What information do you want?"

"Whatever gave you the idea I wanted something from you?" Chris went wide-eyed. If these fools thought all she was good for was dress-up, she was going to play their game.

Marcus laughed. "I may be a man, Detective Cagney, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid."

Chris gave him a smile. "No. I don't think you're stupid, Petrie."

"So what do you want?"

"Tell me about this shivah. I mean, what would I need to know if I went up to see Mrs. Goldman?"

Petrie whistled. "You're going to play for the big stakes, huh? You realize Samuels will have your badge if he ever finds out."

Christine nodded. "But he hasn't solved the crime yet. He should give others a chance."

"Others meaning you."

Chris stood, her anger rising. "Are you going to tell me what I need to know or do I just go there on my own?"

Marcus pulled out a chair and sank down into it. "I'll tell you, if you promise it stays between us."

Putting her hand up as if in court, Chris nodded. "I promise."

Moments later, Christine hurried to the locker room, whistling, and found Mary Beth was there changing back into her hooker clothes. "I'm going to a meeting," Mary Beth told her, adjusting her patterned hose.

"What type of meeting? PTA?"

Frustrated, Mary Beth retorted, "You wouldn't be interested."

"Try me." Chris put her hand on the locker as Mary Beth started to close it.

"Some of the women are trying to form a union."

"What women? *Those* women? A union?" Chris laughed.

"It's not funny. They get pushed in every direction." Mary Beth put the zebra coat over her shoulders and fixed the wig.

"Who'll be there?" Chris asked.

"All of them—Shanghai, Honey, the rest."

Christine turned toward her locker. "And what are you going to do about it?"

"What do you care? You don't even want to come. Those women are so scared, Christine."

"Well, they should be." Chris tied the belt of her trenchcoat. "Those pimps are bad news." She sighed. "Where's it going to be?"

A smile came to Mary Beth's eyes. "I got the address here."

"Write it down for me."

"Why?" Mary Beth said suspiciously.

"I got an errand to run."

"Where?" Mary Beth eyed her partner. "What are you up to?"

Chris smiled her elusive smile and shrugged. "Something. See you later."

She hurried out of the station before Mary Beth could question her more.

The home of the murdered man was a penthouse on the Upper West Side. The Goldman living room was furnished in expensive new "antiques," with cabriole legs, damask covers, and shepherdess bisque lamps.

Chris stood at the entrance, seeing the women seated about the room. All were tastefully dressed, but each had a piece of cloth torn in a symbol of mourning. Trays of food, cakes, and drinks were on the table, but no one was eating or drinking. All the mirrors and pictures had been covered by sheets—another symbol of mourning.

Chris could hear the men gathered in the other room, praying. Taking off her shoes, she entered the room.

She felt all eyes on her as she moved toward where the widow was seated. With reverence, she approached the woman who was pointed out as the widow. "Excuse me—Mrs. Goldman?" Chris sat down on the sofa.

The teary-eyed woman glanced up at her. "You knew my husband? How?"

Chris blushed slightly. "No, actually I didn't know him. I'm from the police." She showed her badge.

"Please." Mrs. Goldman pulled out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes. "Please—go. It will do no good to talk now."

Desperate for a lead that would give her the edge, that would make Samuels take notice of her, Chris pleaded, "Mrs. Goldman, I understand your grief—really I do. But we're only trying to help."

"Help? What help? My husband, rest his soul, is in the grave. How will you help?" She used the handkerchief again to blow her nose. Chris could only stare at the numbers the Nazis had tattooed on the woman's arm.

"Please. Go. Have some respect for the dead."

The raised voice of the widow brought a halt to the prayers. One of the black-coated Hasidim came out of the other room and stared at Chris.

"I'm just trying to do my job," she told him. "We can't let a murderer get away."

"What job?" the Hasid asked.

"I'm a police officer," Chris responded, showing them her badge.

None of them looked at her identification. They didn't seem to believe her.

Mrs. Goldman took a tissue from a nearby box. "I don't know what you want, but please go. Have respect for the dead."

With a heavy heart, Christine stood. "All right. I'll go. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

Leaning against the door, Mary Beth listened as the other women talked about their grievances. She wanted to help, but all she could do was be another voice.

"We have to legalize," Honey stated. "We don't need more laws. They just give the cops more to hassle us with."

"Yeah," Mary Beth started to say. Then she realized all eyes had turned toward her and she felt herself blush. What the hell was she going to say? Here she was a cop and if these women found out, she would be the one being hassled. "You're perfectly right," she managed to add.

"If my dude so much as knew I was here, he'd neutralize my natural," said Terry.

Honey grabbed a candy from the tray. "Sugar's my man," she said, trying to make a joke as she held up the sweet. "As the government report says, sugar can kill you."

"Well, I've been talkin', like you said. Only, as much as I rev 'em up, Female knocks 'em down," Gloria reported.

"Keep talkin'," Terry said.

"I do. I do." Gloria paused as they all heard the knock on the door. Mary Beth could sense their fear, each girl worried it was her pimp. She opened the door.

"So?" Christine asked, coming in and lighting a cigarette. "What's been happening? Sorry I'm late. I had a live one."

Walking away from the meeting nearly an hour later, Chris and Mary Beth were on either side of Honey as a white Cadillac Seville pulled up to the curb. "My God," Honey cried, "it's Sugar!" Within seconds she had run down an alley. Mary Beth and Chris began to follow as two thugs raced out of the car behind them.

There was no mistaking Sugar. Wearing velvet jeans and a two-hundred-dollar silk shirt, he was the meanest-looking pimp either woman had ever seen. With a right jab, Chris slugged one of the men and Mary Beth kicked another as a third pulled on her zebra coat, yanking her back to the car and inside.

Horrified, Chris began to run after the car as it pulled away. What the hell was she going to do? If she pulled her gun, it would blow their cover. On the other hand, she couldn't let anything happen to Mary Beth. There was no choice. She reached into her purse, but before she could do anything the car screeched to a halt and Mary Beth was thrown violently from the Cadillac. As it sped off, Chris ran to her. "You okay?"

"Yeah." Mary Beth sighed, getting painfully to her feet. "I think so. Sugar obviously wanted Honey, not me."

With ice over her eye, Mary Beth winced as Harvey looked over her bruises. "I'm okay, Harve. Really I am."

"All the same," he said, "we're going to the hospital tomorrow to check you out."

The door to Michael's room opened and he came out, rubbing his eyes. He ran to his mother. "Mommy, you're hurt."

"No, sweetie, I'm all right." Mary Beth hugged her son to her.

Chris stared a moment at the family scene. "I'll see you tomorrow, Mary Beth, okay?"

"Not tomorrow!" Harvey's voice was hot.

Mary Beth glanced at her husband a moment and then nodded at Christine. "Wednesday," she said.

In a way, Chris thought, although she didn't want her partner hurt, this was probably the best thing that could have happened. If Wells thought there was real danger involved, he'd have to pull them off.

As Chris began to tell the captain what had happened, the phone rang.

"No, damn it! I don't have any statement." He slammed the phone down. He looked up at Cagney. "Go on."

"She's okay. It was just a fluke they got her. It was Sugar. He was after one of his girls."

The phone rang again.

Frowning, the captain thundered, "I don't want to talk to him!" He listened a moment. "All right, all right, put him through." As he lifted the red phone, Chris noticed an immediate change in his manner. "Your Honor, how good of you to call." He paused, listening. "I know you are, sir. We are, too. Very concerned. I have my best men on the case. We'll have a report to you within the week." Wincing at the click at the other end, he put down the receiver.

"Excuse me, sir," Chris said, "I've been doing a little legwork in my spare time—"

Wells wasn't listening to her. "It's the convention. He wants all those broads off the street, everything solved nice and tidy. You do your job and let Samuels and Petrie do theirs."

"You may not have to worry about the 'broad's.' The pimps will take them off the street for you," Chris protested.

"Good."

"No, not good. They're human beings—they need protection."

Wells seemed surprised at her reaction. "You gonna be emotional—or you gonna be a good cop?"

His words stopped Chris short. There was no response she could give to that.

"Why don't you take the day off, Cagney." It wasn't a question but a command. Her only response was to leave the room, shutting the door firmly behind her.

Isbecki stopped her on the stairs. "Hey, Cagney, you like Polish food?"

"Is that a joke?"

"No joke," Isbecki said. "I'm a good cook."

Chris looked at him. "Your place?"

"Yeah." He grinned.

Turning abruptly, Chris responded, "That's a joke." She left him standing on the stairs and hurried down to the squadroom.

Petrie was alone in the office. "It was like you said," Chris told him.

"You got in?" Petrie was amazed.

Chris nodded. "But I didn't learn much. How do *you* know so much about Jewish customs?"

"I read it somewhere. I'm blessed with total recall."

"You didn't tell Samuels where I was going?"

"I forgot," Petrie said as Samuels came into the office.

"What did you forget, Marcus?" Samuels asked.

Petrie told him.

Even Chris, who could cuss and swear like a trucker, didn't believe the words Samuels yelled. She stared at Petrie, who took it all stoically.

"Are you done, sir?" Marcus asked.

Samuels merely glared at him as Petrie grabbed his coat and gave Chris hers.

She followed him out and down the street to Casey's bar.

After they ordered beers, Chris said, "I'm sorry, Petrie."

"Sticks and stones. He'll cool off."

"Well, it was nice of you to try."

"No favor. Sometimes you get a fresh eye on a case, and God knows you've got some fresh eye."

Chris gave a laugh. "It comes with the mouth. I don't know how *you* take it. It's the same package, racism and sexism."

"Dinosaurs fighting extinction," Petrie shrugged and took a long drink on his beer. "You get anything from Goldman's widow?"

Chris shook her head. "She was in a camp, too. I saw the tattoo."

"It's not much of a clue," Petrie told her. "Ninety-eight percent of the diamond industry is Jewish. A lot of the old ones went through that."

"What about the other guy—Friedlander."

"Auschwitz. Same as Goldman."

"You think it might have been revenge?"

Petrie shook his head.

Looking down into her drink, Chris hesitated. "There were some who collaborated with the Nazis—to save their kids."

"The Kapos. We looked into it. Neither Goldman nor Friedlander."

Chris sipped her beer. "I'm glad I'm wrong on that, but I don't get it."

"Welcome to the club." Petrie gave her a smile.

"What about Friedlander? He has a widow, too, doesn't he?"

Laughing, Marcus put his hand on her shoulder. "You'll have an even harder time getting in to see her."

Chris grinned up at him. "How much do you want to bet?"

At one that afternoon, Christine left the subway at Forty-seventh Street and walked to the National Jewelry Exchange. The guard at the first floor stopped her as four Hasidic Jews—brokers—filed past. Smiling her prettiest, Chris whipped out her badge. The guard nodded and she climbed the stairs to the second floor.

Opposite the steel door marked FRIEDLANDER—DIAMONDS WHOLESALE AND RETAIL, Chris was stopped by a second guard. Waiting until she was given the nod, she reached for the doorknob—only to find it locked. Seeing a TV monitor, she buzzed and held up her identification. "Detective Cagney, Fourteenth Precinct," she said. The buzzer released the lock. As she stepped into the office, she said, "I want to see Mrs. Friedlander."

"You have an appointment?" The secretary spoke to her through a glass pane and bars.

"It's police business. About Mr. Friedlander."

"Sorry, if you don't have an appointment—" The receptionist turned away from Chris and picked up the phone. A few seconds later, Chris heard the admitting buzz once more. The receptionist indicated that Chris was to go in.

Mrs. Friedlander was a tiny woman with wavy reddish hair. She seemed lost behind the mounds of papers on her desk and yet she seemed to be efficiently taking care of them. It was impossible not to notice the picture of her husband prominently on the wall. The office was masculine right down to the cigar humidor on the desk.

Wearing a black suit with a tasteful diamond brooch and combined wedding and engagement rings, Mrs. Friedlander looked the proper businesswoman as she came around to the other side of the desk and offered Chris a seat.

"What can I do for you?" she asked. "What can I tell you that I haven't already told the police?"

"I don't know." Chris shrugged. "But maybe I'll hear it differently."

Mrs. Friedlander assessed Chris. "Maybe you will." Picking up the phone, she instructed the receptionist to hold all calls.

"You worked with your husband?"

Sighing, Mrs. Friedlander shook her head. "No, I stepped in and took over. Someone had to. My daughter's married. My son is married, too. *She* has to live in Phoenix. There's no one else to work the business."

"I bet you've learned a lot this past year."

The widow stared at her a moment. "You wouldn't believe what I've learned."

Chris gave a bitter laugh. "Oh, I believe it. I work in a world full of men, too."

The atmosphere relaxed. "What else do you want to know?"

Chris came to the point. "Did your husband have any enemies?"

"My dear, he was a Jew. Jews always have enemies."

Chris shook her head. "I mean of a personal nature."

Tears came to the widow's eyes. "My Joey would have given you the shirt off his back—monogrammed. No, he had no enemies. Besides, who would have gotten in? You see our security."

Chris nodded. "Then it had to have been someone he knew. Trusted. Another Jew? Someone from the camps in Germany?"

A pained expression crossed Mrs. Friedlander's face. "It's possible. I saw—" She closed her eyes. "God in heaven, what I saw. People. They do terrible things. Terrible."

"He was under pressure, your husband?"

"Who isn't?" Mrs. Friedlander toyed with some paper clips on the desk.

"But I mean some exceptional pressure," Chris continued to press.

The widow sighed. "He was. I tried not to see it, but I would wake in the night and see him awake. He was worried, but he didn't want me to worry. 'Be pretty,' he would tell me." She shrugged. "What could I do? He would have worried more if he knew I was worried."

"You have no ideas?"

Once more Mrs. Friedlander shrugged. "He was a Jew in the diamond business. You can put a million dollars' worth of diamonds in your pocket. I think that's why so many Jews are in the business." She forced a smile. "A country decides it doesn't want you, you have to leave quickly. Sometimes with no luggage." She stared at Chris.

"So he carried the stones. Was he insured for those stolen?"

"Who said stolen? That's what they told you?" She paused. "So if they were stolen, where are they? If they were stolen, they would have been sold." Mrs. Friedlander went back behind the desk, took some sheets of paper from one of the piles, and handed them to Chris.

"Not in Belgium, Africa, Buenos Aires. Not even behind the Iron Curtain. Nowhere."

Chris's eyes widened. "But how?" She scanned the papers. "How can you be so sure?"

Mrs. Friedlander smiled slightly. "A CIA we're not. But we do have the Diamond Market Association. Every stone ever cut is listed. They can't refuse to talk to a cop—even if you *are* a woman."

Cagney stood as Mrs. Friedlander began writing out the address for her. Then, standing, the widow crumpled the paper in her hands. "Wait. I'll go with you. There are things I want to know, too. Maybe it's about time."

At the Diamond Market, Chris shook hands with a jovial man wearing a monocle. But even as they talked, it appeared Manny Silverman didn't know anything more than Mrs. Friedlander had. But he was, at least, able to relieve the widow's worry. There had been no other woman in the murdered man's life. But unfortunately, although Manny said he loved Joseph Friedlander like a brother and would have killed for him if necessary, the dead man hadn't trusted his friend with the secret of his worry.

"All he used to say was 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'"

Thanking Mr. Silverman for his help, Chris stood. She had a lead, but where was it going to take her?

Female was talking with Coleman, the desk sergeant, when Mary Beth and Chris arrived at the precinct the next day. He was razzing her about her pimp beating her up, and Female was trying to explain about her ten-year-old son who had saved her life.

Mary Beth stared at the girl's swollen left eye and her lips, which had been cut, and held her breath. If she and Chris turned away quickly, the hooker wouldn't see them. But it was too late. In the midst of her complaint, which Coleman didn't seem to be taking too seriously, Female spotted both women.

Rushing toward them in anger, she said, "I might have known you two were trouble!" She brushed past them out the door without giving them a chance to talk.

"Well, that does it," Chris said, all too pleased. "I'm going to talk to Wells and get us off this assignment."

Horried, Mary Beth glared at her. "No! Don't you dare!" She started for the door.

"Where you going?"

"To talk to her!"

Outside, Mary Beth intercepted Female. "Please—wait!"

"Why should I?" The prostitute was angry. "You're a cop!"

"Look, it's a job. My husband's out of work," Mary Beth said, trying to win the woman's trust.

"Otherwise you'd be home baking cookies, right?"

Mary Beth took a deep breath. "No."

The acid was clear in Female's tone. "Well, maybe I would. Only I didn't have no choice." Her voice was hoarse, obviously a result of her injury.

"Sugar did that to you, didn't he?"

Female stared coldly at Mary Beth. "What do you care?"

"I care. Look—" Mary Beth put her hand on the girl's arm "—we can help you. Really we can."

There was no response from the hooker.

"You got kids?" Mary Beth said, refusing to give up. "I got two."

"I got me one," Female said grudgingly. "It was him who saved me. He slashed that dude with our bread knife."

"Please. Let us help."

Female looked at Mary Beth and walked away.

There was nothing Mary Beth could do but wait and hope to win the woman's trust. She only hoped Female wouldn't tell the others. Their cover couldn't be blown. Not now.

A few hours later, Christine decided to try her luck with Samuels. He was on the phone when she walked in, apparently trying to mollify someone who wanted to know why he hadn't done anything about some case. .

When he hung up, she approached him. "Sir, I've got some leads on the Friedlander case. I know you questioned the widow, but—"

Samuels wagged a finger at her. "I want you to keep your nose out of my case. If you don't, I'll get you transferred. Is that clear?"

Chris met his gaze. "Transparent."

Samuels narrowed his eyes. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you don't want to have this case solved. Not by Petrie or me. I know you've got him on some nothing detail for having talked to me." She paused and tried another tactic. "Look, I only want to help."

"Yeah?" His voice was doubtful.

"Yes!"

"Then get out of my light," Samuels growled. "I've got work to do." Without another word, Chris slammed out of the office.

Mary Beth had been about to enter.

"Where are you going?" Mary Beth asked as they collided.

"Out. I need a drink."

"Good. I know just the place."

The bar was nearly ten blocks away.

"I really think I've got a lead on that damn case," Chris complained as she drank her wine. "Samuels wouldn't even listen to me."

"No kidding."

Chris glared at her. "You're not listening to me, either."

Mary Beth glanced at her watch. "Okay. So tell me about it."

"Friedlander had an enemy."

"I'll say." Mary Beth drained her glass and glanced about.

"Now, if Goldman had the same enemy that would be really heavy."

"Christine," Mary Beth warned, "I think you better stay out of this. Samuels is a good cop."

"I don't want his shield."

"Don't you?"

"No." Chris poured more wine from the decanter between them. "I want my own." She paused. "So why did we come here? We could have gone to Casey's."

"You didn't want to be overheard, did you?"

Chris studied her partner's face. She knew Mary Beth almost as well as Mary Beth knew her. "What's the real story?"

Mary Beth sighed. "We're meeting some people."

Chris felt her back stiffen. "Who?"

"The women."

"You're kidding."

"Christine, they really want this union." She paused, seeing her friend's disbelief. "Promise me you won't tell Wells about the cover being blown."

Chris sighed. "I promise." She looked up as the waiter came over and handed them a piece of paper.

"We don't want—" Mary Beth began, and then she saw it wasn't the check. The note said: *Betsy's place*.

"Come on," she said to Chris. "We've got a meeting to attend."

The meeting wasn't the success Mary Beth had hoped it would be.

She was shocked at some of the stories the girls told. They wanted the union all right, but they were scared. Sugar already suspected something and had beaten Honey up. "Where did he get you?" Chris asked.

"Where he always get me," Honey replied.

The other prostitutes laughed sourly.

"He beat you in your bedroom?" Mary Beth was aghast.

"Sugar is a natural man," Terry said as the door opened and Female walked in.

"You keep Sugar out of your mouth," Female said. "Sittin' here conversin' with cops."

Honey went up to Female. "Hey, Female—join us."

"A whore needs a pimp," Female said, wrenching away from her.

"You're a whore, just like me."

"I'm a working woman," Honey defended herself.

"You're a piece of meat, baby. Ain't nothin' gonna change that." Without another word, Female walked out. Honey started after her.

"You're wasting your breath," Gloria told her.

Terry was clearly frightened. "She'll head straight for Sugar, tell him everything. Where we're meeting, who was here." She stood as if to leave.

Betsy, the youngest of the group, looked around at each of them. "Who could be a cop?" she said fearfully.

Each of the girls sized up the others suspiciously.

"What do you shoot up, sweetheart?" Terry asked Chris.

Chris smiled. "Mother's chicken soup."

Mary Beth stepped into the center of things. "So what are you going to do? Just forget it? You think it was ever easy for working people to organize?"

"Can the speeches," Chris told her. "What's your idea?"

Mary Beth looked around the room and then turned to her partner. "We go. You and me. And we talk to her until she hears us. Somewhere, she knows what side she's on."

In a scared voice, Terry said, "She's on Sugar's side. That honcho's got her so tied she takin' tricks at home. Moonlightin'."

Chris put on her coat. "Hey, if anyone can talk to her, Mary Beth can, right?"

As they reached street level, Mary Beth said, "I just hope we get to her before she talks to anyone else. It's not going to do these women any good if they know we're cops."

"Yeah," Chris said, "but it might do us some good . . ."

They reached the run-down neighborhood in Harlem where Female lived with her little boy. It was impossible not to be horrified by the broken windows and the poor condition of the streets as the kids played near an open fire hydrant. Passing an Ace Cleaner's truck, they parked the car.

As they climbed the stairs, Christine was instinctively on the alert. Female was standing at the entrance to the apartment, wearing a glittery rhinestone outfit.

Wordlessly, she motioned them up.

"What's wrong?" Chris asked her.

Female shook her head, still unable to speak. Drawing her gun, Chris entered the apartment. As she followed Mary Beth inside, Female's voice was dull. "I didn't do it."

"Sugar?" Mary Beth asked, seeing the body on the bed.

Female nodded and turned away from the sight of the blood.

"No one in here," Chris said. She crossed the room to the phone and began reading Female her rights according to the Miranda law.

"You have the right to remain silent—"

"Wait a minute," Mary Beth interrupted her. "She said she didn't do it. You can wait two minutes, can't you?"

Chris put her finger on the phone button, but didn't put the receiver down. "You got something to say?" She looked at the prostitute.

"Nothin'," Female said.

Turning, Chris began to dial.

Mary Beth reached over and cut her off. "Give her a chance."

With the receiver still in her hand, Chris said, "Go on, then."

"I found him like—that."

"Chris, she couldn't have done it. She was at Betsy's. There wasn't time."

Christine couldn't believe what she was hearing. "We're her alibi, you mean?"

"It's true."

"A definite maybe." Chris paused. "But she *could've* gotten here—that kind of knife job doesn't take long."

With a defiant air, Female said, "Call 'em. I don't give a damn. They wanna hang it on me, they'll hang it on me."

Mary Beth had given Christine something to think about. She turned to the prostitute again. "Who was here?"

"Nobody. A trick. An old man."

"What's his name?" Mary Beth asked, trying to be gentle.

"No name."

Chris found that hard to believe. "You don't know anything about him?"

Female shrugged. "What I do know ain't for no court and don't do no good. An old man—an old Jew. One of them religious kinds."

"And he came to you?" Mary Beth asked.

"You'd be surprised who come to us."

Chris put down the receiver. "How do you know he's religious?"

"You know them dudes—long black coats, beards, funny hats. —Hey, come on, he didn't do *that*." She looked down at Sugar's body and quickly back to Chris. "You think he did that? No way."

"Female, if you didn't, we've got to find him."

Female sat down on a chair and shook her head. "Comes here every Thursday like clockwork." Her voice took on its habitual irony. "Maid's day off. Not mine."

"But today's Friday," Chris was quick to point out.

"Yeah. His hat wasn't ready yesterday. I was fixin' it for him. Big holiday or somethin'. Good-lookin' fur hat."

Chris and Mary Beth were all attention now. "Did he get the hat?" Chris's nerves prickled.

"What? You think I'm gonna leave a fur hat sittin' in the middle of my livin' room on *this* block?" Going to the closet, she took out the flat dark hat belonging to the Bubov sect of the Hasidim. Chris examined it carefully, but there was no name in it, nothing that could identify the man.

"Ain't that a winner? I told him when he give me this skirt, 'You get tired of it, baby, I'll take it off your hands.'"

Chris stared at Female's vest, and then at her skirt, her excitement rising. Those were diamonds, not rhinestones! "He gave you that outfit?"

"Yeah."

"When?"

"I don't know." The hooker was startled.

"Last month? Last year?"

Female thought a moment. "Last year. Right about this time."

"I thought so. Get out of the vest and the skirt and give them to her," Chris ordered, helping Female out of the clothes. The prostitute cooperated, but she was totally confused—as was Mary Beth.

"Call the precinct and report the murder," Chris told her.

"Where you going?" Mary Beth demanded as Chris headed out the door with the clothes.

"I'll be right back. Put the hat in the closet."

Chris's footsteps echoed on the stairs as Mary Beth picked up the phone and called the Fourteenth.

Downstairs, Chris looked about. She had to hide the outfit someplace, but where? The old man would be coming back for it soon. Spying the Ace Cleaner's truck they had passed on the way in, she ran over to it.

"Hey!" She stopped the driver just as he was about to pull away. "I want these cleaned." She handed him the vest and skirt.

The boy whistled. "Wow!" He examined the leather and the intricate weaving of the studs.

"Yeah," Chris agreed.

"I don't know how much it will be, but it's gonna cost you a bundle, especially because of these." He indicated what he believed to be rhinestones.

"I don't care," Chris said hurriedly. "Name's Cagney."

The boy shrugged. Writing out a receipt and handing it to her, he put the garment in back and drove off.

It didn't take long for the homicide team to arrive. Mary Beth kept close to Female, reassuring her that everything was going to be all right. Chris kept looking about, trying to see if there were any clues she had missed. "You'll take care of my boy?" Female asked Mary Beth, astonished a cop would do that.

"Like he was my own." Mary Beth raised her hand, Girl Scout style.

Female sighed. "Guess I was wrong about you." She kissed her son.

Mary Beth forced a smile, and gave the ten-year-old Randy instructions about what to pack. While the boy was busy, she moved over to Chris. "So? You want to tell me about that vest and skirt?"

Chris glanced at the homicide people. "Later," she said.

When they were finally alone in the apartment, except for Randy packing a suitcase in the other room, Mary Beth asked again, "So?"

Chris flipped open her notebook. "Okay, listen to this. Two Hasidic diamond merchants are killed—probably by a fellow Jew. The diamonds don't appear anywhere on the international market. Now a pimp is killed by a Hasidic Jew who has given the pimp's best lady a vest and a skirt covered with rhinestones."

"You can't be saying he gave Female diamonds?"

"Why not?" Christine said. "What better way to hide them than in plain sight? Sugar sees him, sees the diamonds, puts two and two together, and *whammo!*"

Mary Beth's eyes widened. "Could it have been?"

"If we don't find him, Female's had it. I can't imagine the good old liberal public defender shedding many tears at a pimp being killed by a prostitute. It would be open-and-shut."

Mary Beth sighed. "But what about the vest and skirt?"

"They're safe." Christine gave one of her mysterious smiles.

Mary Beth stood. "You know, I sometimes have the feeling you don't trust even me. I think we ought to go back to the station and tell Samuels about those clothes."

Christine's back went ramrod. "I am not telling Samuels anything! You think I want to end up on some dirt detail like Petrie?"

"Petrie broke the rules."

"Well, I'm going to break a few rules, too."

Mary Beth stared at her. She couldn't believe this was the same Christine who was a stickler for doing everything by the book. "Listen, I know you're trying to be tough, but you're not going to break them by showing how macho you are."

Chris shrugged and started for the door.

"Where ya *going?*" Mary Beth demanded.

Chris smiled at her. "Oh, I thought I'd have my hair done and get a manicure, and perhaps have some of those dainty tea sandwiches at the ladies' auxiliary."

Mary Beth stared at her. "I'm going to tell Samuels."

"You do that," Chris said as her parting shot. "Or maybe you have to ask Harve's permission first." She ran down the steps before her partner could answer.

Mary Beth shook her head and waited for Randy. When he came out of his room carrying a suitcase, she took his hand. "Come on, sweetie." Leading him to the door, she suppressed a smile as he reached behind the couch for his Snoopy doll.

In the lockup, Christine paced as Female sat on the narrow cot, her head in her hands. Her dinner tray was on the table, untouched. "I'm trying to help," Christine said through clenched teeth.

"I know all about the good cop and the bad cop. Your partner would have been more convincing."

Christine stared at her. "We all make career choices."

Female stood and began to pace the cell with Chris. "I had two hot choices—to clean other women's houses or mess with their husbands."

With a chill, Chris realized Female was probably right. "Well, you got a choice now. Look, I *am* a good cop, but right now they've got me on a crud detail. But I've got this lead and I want to prove I'm good for more. I can't do it without your help." Chris sat on the bed. "Please. Tell me anything you remember."

"I told you I don't *know* anything more."

"You've got to remember," Chris insisted. "I can't help you unless you do."

Female sighed. She sat beside Christine and closed her eyes as she tried to recall. "He didn't talk much, just gave orders."

"Orders?"

"Do this, do that. His way. I didn't care. They were his bucks."

Chris hesitated. "Was he—mean?"

"No." Female shook her head. "But I'm sure he could be. Those eyes." She shivered.

"Did he have an accent?"

"They all do, them folks. Look alike and sound alike. From Europe someplace, I guess."

"A Jew from the diamond merchants?"

"Diamonds?" Female's voice went hoarse.

"You didn't know?" Chris stared at her. "I thought you knew when I took the vest and skirt."

"Diamonds," Female repeated to herself in a daze as she stared at the bars to her cell. "Diamonds. Me and my boy and my man could have been long gone. *Diamonds?*" She turned to Chris again.

Christine nodded. "Tell me when he gave you the vest and the skirt."

Female shook her head as she tried to think. "The vest a few weeks ago maybe. But I had the skirt at least a year."

"When is important," Chris told her. "Look, a year ago a diamond merchant was killed. Two weeks ago another one was stabbed, too."

Female took in a fearful breath. "*He did that?*"

Christine nodded. "I think so. But we have to find him to prove it."

Shaking her head as if to stimulate her thought, Female said, "You know, I didn't think nothin' of it. I mean, some dudes have their own things, you know. I figured he just wanted me to dress up."

"Did he ever mention being in the camps during the war?" Chris felt her blood buzzing. She was close, so very close.

"Yeah, he mentioned it. Auschwitz, I think it was."

Christine felt her heart beat faster. She swallowed hard. "What was his tattoo number? Do you remember?"

Female gave her a strange look. "Tattoo? That dude didn't have no tattoo. Less it was under his beard."

"He had to have," Chris insisted. "On his arm."

"That dude didn't have no tattoo," Female insisted. "Who would know better?"

"Okay." Chris sighed. "If you recall anything more, let me know. I'll be by tomorrow." She stood.

"Wait, I just remembered somethin' funny."

"What?"

"It was his cock."

"His what?" For all her sophistication, Chris felt herself flushing. "What do you mean?"

Female grinned at Chris's discomfort. "It weren't like the other Jew boys I been with. They're all—" She waved her hand as if searching for the word.

"Circumcised?"

"Yeah, they ain't got no foreskin." Female stood. "But *he* did."

Christine stared at her. Jews had to be circumcised. Even those that didn't practice the religion had it done, didn't they? She would have to ask Petrie. He would know.

In a rare show of emotion, she touched the prostitute's hand. "Thanks. What you've remembered is a big help." Turning, she called out, "Guard, I'm ready."

The uniformed man swaggered over. "Yeah, what are you ready for, blondie?"

Chris glared at him and flashed her shield. "Detective Cagney. Fourteenth."

"Pardon me, sir. I just came on duty." The guard quickly undid the lock.

"Not *sir*—*ma'am*," Chris corrected him as she left the cell.

"Hey, Cagney—" Female called out.

Chris looked back.

It was difficult for Female to say thank you, especially to a white cop. "See you later."

There was only one person who could answer Chris's questions.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quickly, she hurried to the National Jewelry Exchange. She found Mrs. Friedlander just about to leave.

"Please," Chris said. "I must talk to you. It won't take long."

"It's my night to see my grandson. I must get there quickly before they put him to bed."

"It won't take long, I promise." Christine hurried along the street with Mrs. Friedlander as the woman kept up a brisk pace. "Tell me, would it be possible to be in the camps and not have a number?"

"Maybe when they were busy at the end, I don't know. Maybe plastic surgery."

"No, no—that doesn't make sense. This suspect isn't someone trying to pass. He's a Jew. A religious man. Who else was in the camps?"

"Nazis."

"Nazis." Christine let the idea run through her brain.

Mrs. Friedlander snorted. "What? You're so young? They don't teach in school? There were Nazis, nuns, priests, and anyone else who dared to go against the butchers."

Chris stopped suddenly and gazed at the woman. "Wait. If a Nazi wanted to get out, to escape before the war-crimes trials, could he dress like a Jew—act like a Jew?"

Mrs. Friedlander halted, catching her breath. "There was one who did that." Chris could hear the hatred in her voice. "May he rot in hell. He even spoke our language. A spy. He would ask about our families. They would go out and get them. We didn't know." Tears were in her eyes. "We didn't know. Schirmer." She shook her head. "Schirmer!"

Her eyes seemed to widen. "My God! Schirmer is here! Schirmer killed my Yosel. A hundred years later it seems. Schirmer. Oh, my God!"

"Schirmer?" Chris put her hands on the woman's shoulders. "Where would he be?"

The widow closed her eyes, cursing and crying. "I saw it. I saw it in Yosel's writing. He wrote the name over and over. I thought he was just recalling the past."

"How can I find him?"

Mrs. Friedlander shook her head. "Don't find him. Don't let him find you! You don't know what he is. Maybe no one else will recognize him. Maybe it's over."

"You know better than that." Chris took her hand.

Yaffa Friedlander shook her head. "I'm afraid."

"Where do I go?" Chris insisted. "He's posing as a Hasid. How do I start?"

It was overwhelming. "So many sects. So many types. Different neighborhoods. The Hasids have their own splits. This one thinks this, this one thinks that. The only ones who might talk to you are over there." Yaffa pointed toward the Lubavitch Sukkah Mobile.

Nodding, Chris ran over to the wagon. "May I speak to you a moment?"

"Can we help you?" A young boy with long curls down his cheeks and the traditional head covering looked at her. He handed her a lulab and ethrog, the ornaments of the Sukkoth holiday. "Would you like some literature?"

"I'm the police. Detective Cagney. Fourteenth."

The boy stepped back. "We have a permit."

Chris shook her head. "No. That's not what I want. I need to find someone. A man named Schirmer. You ever hear of him?"

The boy shook his head. "Maybe we can talk some other time."

Refusing to be put off, Chris continued, "He was in Auschwitz, posing as a Jew. He got information and passed it on. You've never heard the name? Schirmer?"

"No," the boy said.

"Schirmer?" A second Hasidic boy came over to them and spit on the ground.

Chris felt a glimmer of hope. "You know him? You've heard of him?"

"I've heard of him."

"Then I must talk to you."

"Does it have to be now? It's nearly a holiday."

"This man's a murderer. I must find him. Now."

The boys opened the door to the trailer—the "Sukkoth on Wheels." "Come," the second one said, "we'll talk."

At the table inside, the three sat. "All I know is he's a Hasid," Cagney said.

"That's a lot of territory. What did he look like?"

"Like you."

"A *little* like us? A *lot* like us? There's a difference. There are those from Crown Heights and those from Borough Park. We all dress different. "Do you know his clothes? His fringes?"

Chris shook her head, feeling helpless. Was it all going to end here?

"No, not his fringes," the second boy said, "it's his hat. That will be the giveaway."

"Hat!" Chris's face lit up. "I know his hat. It was fur."

"And you're a detective," the boy sneered. "Describe it."

"Dark fur. Not mink."

The boys shook their heads. "Round? Short? Flat?"

Excited, Chris took out paper. "Here, let me draw it."

It took several drawings before she got it right. The Lubavitcher determined Schirmer was among the group from Borough Park.

Chris hailed a taxi. She told herself she would get that bastard, and get him tonight. Then Samuels would have to admit she was good.

Once in Borough Park, though, things didn't prove as easy as she had hoped. She talked to one storekeeper and then another. She went into clothing stores and talked to women on the street.

Finally, she stopped at a greengrocer's.

"You looking for someone?" the owner asked. He pushed at the skullcap on his head.

"Yes, I am. Do you live in the area?" Chris showed him her shield.

"What is it? Drugs?"

She shook her head. "Murder."

"Murder? Here?"

Chris nodded.

"You're wrong. Not in our area."

Chris sighed. "You've lived here a long time?"

"Who can afford to move?"

Chris nodded. "This man, his name is Schirmer. He would have only recently moved here. Maybe a year or so ago. He wears the Bubar dress."

The owner shook his head. "A religious man? How could he face God?"

"He won't have the chance to. He'll be with all the rest of the master race. I'll be back in case you think of anything." Hurrying out, she continued asking questions.

Finally, thirst overcame her and she stopped at a diner.

"You want something more than coffee? Eggs?"

Chris shook her head. "I don't want anything more. I just want to find a man named Schirmer. Look, Miss—"

"Ruby. My sister's Pearl. Would you believe it? My father wasn't even in the business—"

"The man is a murderer. I have to find him."

"So," Ruby said, "tonight, if he's in Borough Park, where would he be?"

Chris drummed her fingers on the countertop. "That's what I want to know."

"I forgot," Ruby said, "you're an outsider. Tonight on Hoshanna Rabbah, the seventh day of the holiday, the Torahs are brought to the bimah."

"What?"

Ruby smiled. "The reading desk of the synagogue."

"And everyone goes there?"

"Anita Bryant will probably stay home in Florida."

Chris stood abruptly. Throwing money on the counter, she said, "Your folks were right. You are a jewel."

Going to the phone, she dialed Mary Beth's phone number.

At the Lacey apartment, Michael, Harvey, Jr., and Randy were staring at their dinner. No one was eating.

"Great stew, Harve," Mary Beth said.

"Yeah," Harvey muttered.

"Mom, can I go? I can't stand squishy peas," Michael said.

Mary Beth nodded.

Michael threw down his napkin and left the room. His brother followed, taking Female's son with him.

"I had a real bad day today," Mary Beth said.

There was no response from Harvey.

"I guess you did, too," Mary Beth said lamely. She attempted to touch her husband and he pulled away.

"I got up today."

"Oh." Mary Beth paused. "Chris and I had words."

"No kidding. I thought you only had deeds."

"Harve, she's my best friend."

"Well, good." He stood and started to clear the table. "I hope you'll both be very happy."

Tucking the kids in, she stood for a moment and stared out the window at the coming darkness. Hearing Harvey go into the bedroom, her heart was heavy. Maybe if they could talk. She went to the bedroom door and knocked. "Can I come in?"

Harvey was sitting on the bed. "You pay the rent."

His words were a barb but she ignored them and sat down on the

bed. "I'm worried about Christine. It's been tough for her. Those guys treat us like lepers."

"So?" Harvey refused to look at her. "I really don't care."

Mary Beth felt hot tears come to her eyes. Quickly she brushed them away. Harvey turned toward her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. I do care about *you*. *She's* probably driving them up the wall."

"In a Sherman tank." Mary Beth gave a laugh.

"I knew it."

Mary Beth stood. "She's liable to do something foolish."

"So what else is new?"

There was no talking with this man. Mary Beth grabbed her shoes and coat.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To look for my partner."

Harvey stood. "You're not going out of this house tonight."

Mary Beth's mouth dropped open. "I don't even talk to the kids like that."

"Maybe they don't need it."

Tears came again to her eyes. "Maybe I don't need it, either! Maybe I need some loving and comfort—some support!"

"I know. Have you hugged your cop today?"

"Harvey Lacey," she said, "I was a cop before we were married. We talked about this from the beginning."

"If your job is so important—"

Her temper was up now. The dam that had held everything in suddenly burst. "And I *do* pay the rent! And I'm sick and tired of all this." Her voice caught with the tears. "I hate looking in the mirror and wondering why I'm so unattractive, why my husband won't make love to me." She couldn't help the tears now.

"I'm sorry." Harvey started to come forward.

"Don't sorry me—I'm not sad, I'm mad."

He came closer.

"Don't you touch me, Harvey Lacey!" She turned to leave. "I'm going to find my partner."

"Well, how the hell do you think that makes me feel? Your partner! I mean, knowing I can't support my family."

Mary Beth came forward now. The anger was still in her. "If you're having a problem, quit hanging around here for a construction job. There are other things you can do."

"What the hell—you want me to get a job as a dishwasher?"

She glared at him. "You've had enough experience now, haven't you?"

Harvey's eyes showed his hurt, but he forced a laugh.

There was a long silence before Mary Beth got hold of her emotions. "Honey, I know you feel like a real man when you're up on those girders, swearing with the guys, wearing your hard hat, but you've always been a man to me."

Harvey turned and stared at her. "How would you feel if I took over the super's job? I mean, now that he's moving to Florida."

Mary Beth held her breath. "Super."

"You mean it?"

She nodded as Harvey put his arms on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. Leaning down, he kissed her. Mary Beth responded, kissing him with all the pent-up passion she had missed the whole past year. Kissing him again, she dropped her shoes and her coat.

He kissed her nose. "We gotta make up for lost time," he said.

"We will," she laughed. "We will."

Back in the Borough Park phone booth, Chris waited anxiously. Finally, on the sixth ring, her partner answered. "Look, I got him. I'm sure I've got him. I'm in Borough Park. He's going to be in one of the synagogues. He has to be. I'm going to try and get him to Ace Cleaners, where I have Female's outfit."

"Wait a minute. Explain it to me."

Partway into her explanation, the operator broke in. "Your time is up."

"No—no, wait! Mary Beth, tell—"

The call was cut.

"Damn!" Chris cursed. She found more change in her pocket. "Thank you, God." Redialing, she spoke quickly as soon as Harvey picked up. "Listen, tell Mary Beth to get the troops. Petrie's on some stupid detail in the Forty-ninth. Tell her to get him. I'll see you."

"Find out where she is," Mary Beth instructed Harvey as she slipped into a sweater and pulled on her jeans.

Harvey held the receiver so Mary Beth could hear the disconnection. "She wants you to get the troops. Where did she tell you she is?"

"Borough Park."

Harvey jumped out of the bed. "I'll drive you."

"Who's going to watch the boys?"

"You're dealing with a killer—"

"I'll get Petrie to take me." She hugged Harvey and put on her gun. Giving him another fast peck on the cheek, she left.

Randy came to the doorway.

"I think you got monsters in this here apartment," the boy said. "I can't sleep."

Harvey smiled. Indicating the bed, he said, "Be my guest."

Bravely, Randy marched into the room, hugging his Snoopy doll.

In Borough Park, Chris was having a more difficult time than she thought. None of the men would talk to her—they even went to the other side of the street to avoid her.

Going up to some of the women, she held out her shield. "I'm looking for a murderer."

Several of the women spoke in Hebrew, but none spoke to her. "Please, two women are widowed because of him. He's just murdered a third time to protect the diamonds he stole. I have those diamonds. Help me smoke him out. He must be here tonight. You have to help me—please, we're sisters."

The women continued on toward the synagogue, not talking to her.

At the station, Samuels reacted just as Mary Beth had expected.

"All right," he said, "run it by me one more time."

There was fury in Mary Beth's voice. "If something happens to her because you're too pigheaded to listen—"

Samuels interrupted. "I just want to know what she's doing out there."

Once more, Mary Beth repeated, "She thinks she's found the murderer, the one you've—your case, you know?"

"My case." He began putting talcum powder into his shoes.

"Look, she could be in terrible trouble while we're sitting here arguing! Please!"

Samuels made no comment. Furious, Mary Beth dialed the Forty-ninth station. "I tell you, if anything happens to her, I'll hold you personally responsible." She spoke into the phone. "Detective Lacey, Fourteenth. Is Petrie there?" She listened a moment. "Damn! He's not back yet." She hung up the phone just as Isbecki and Davidson walked in. "You gotta listen—Chris is in trouble."

Getting no reaction from them, she backed away in disgust. "Forget it! I'll go myself!"

As Mary Beth put on her coat, Isbecki melted. "I'll drive with

you," he told her. He turned toward Samuels. "What the hell, I got a sweet little redhead out in Bensonhurst."

Slowly, Samuels stood. "I'm going. I just want to know where."

"I told you," Mary Beth said. "Borough Park. The synagogue there someplace." She started out the door.

"Tell me again," Samuels said.

Fighting hysteria, Mary Beth repeated, "She said she was going to smoke him out with the skirt and the vest—at the cleaners'." Suddenly, she understood what Samuels wanted. "The cleaners up in Harlem. One of those A's—Acme? Ace?" She paused. "Yes, it's Ace. I'm sure."

"Good," Samuels said, grabbing his coat and the phonebook. "Let's go."

Christine continued to walk the streets. Her sixth sense told her that Schirmer knew she was around and that she was looking for him. He would probably try to get to her. If only she could convince him she knew about the diamonds.

He needed the vest and the skirt. They were crucial.

She wandered past the sukkahs with their grass roofs and decorative trimmings.

Her presence was all around. She stepped into an alley, her hand on her gun. But she was purposely putting herself in his path.

The yowl of a cat made her jump. Her heart raced. It was nothing. She continued walking, knowing she had to find him soon. Then, stopping for a moment, she explored one of the harvest houses—and let her guard down.

Swiftly, Schirmer came upon her. His hand clasped over her mouth, and with his other arm he lifted her off the ground, dragging her with him toward his car. Christine looked up into the cold grey eyes and knew Female had been right. There was no question. He had murdered all three.

In the moonlight, his knife glinted near her throat. He motioned her into the driver's seat as he continued to press the knife on her.

As she began driving toward Harlem and the cleaners, Christine started to chatter. "Irony, isn't it, a Nazi killing to retain his identity as a Jew? How many more are you going to kill because they recognize you? What happened? You get hooked on the chicken soup?"

He said nothing, but Chris could feel the coldness of the metal on

her neck. She prayed Mary Beth had gotten hold of Petrie. Someone had to come help her . . .

Still holding the knife on her, Schirmer and Chris left the car. He broke the window of the cleaning plant and forced her inside. "Show me," he ordered, dragging her along the racks as he searched for the clothes, the knife still at her throat. She had to think of something.

"Upstairs." Her voice was tight as she led the way to the elevator. Christine had never been to a cleaning plant at night, but she could only guess and play for time. Pressing the fourth-floor button, she continued to pray.

The choice had been a correct one—at least Schirmer didn't suspect her ruse yet.

"Where?" She glanced about. Someone had left a window open. The rows upon rows of plastic garment bags and gleaming metal rods were moving like ghosts walking. Christine shivered.

"Where?" he repeated.

Chris pointed toward the center of the room and suddenly she saw her chance. Kicking the switch with her foot, she started the wheels in motion and the clothes racks started to spin. Startled, Schirmer let her go and she dived for cover under the plastic bags.

Her gun. Where were her gun and her purse? Then she saw her purse several feet away, by Schirmer's feet. She must have dropped it when she scrambled away from him.

She heard Schirmer's heavy breathing as he moved through the clothes and plastic trying to find her. Could *he* hear *her*? Where were the others? How long could she hold him off?

She inched forward. There was no way to get to her gun. Grabbing a piece of plastic, she twisted it into a rope. Too late, she realized that he had the same plan. The plastic bag on her face was suffocating her.

She fought desperately to be free of his hands around her neck. She didn't know how much longer she could hold out. He was stronger than she. If there was a God in heaven, he had to help her now.

"Chris! Christine!" Mary Beth yelled. "Where are you?"

Even through the plastic and the veil of haziness descending over her vision, Christine could see the terror in Schirmer's eyes.

"Hold it! Hold it!" Mary Beth cried as she burst through the door, with Samuels following.

The surprise was enough to gain Christine time. Tearing the plas-

tic off her face, she gulped in air. Reaching to the floor, she grabbed for her purse and the gun.

Too late, Schirmer realized his captive was free.

Chris stared in horror as he lunged at her. She hadn't killed anyone yet and she didn't want to now. She could feel the air from the open window behind her. As he lunged at her, she did the natural thing. She ducked.

The next few moments were a blur as the huge, bull-like figure of the Nazi sailed over her and crashed through the fourth-floor window. The glass flew everywhere, hitting Chris, hitting the floor, scattering on the street as Schirmer's body thudded on the ground below.

A stunned Chris went to the window and stared down. It was over. He was dead.

"You okay?" Mary Beth came over to her partner.

Chris nodded. She touched Mary Beth's arm. "Thanks. I knew you'd come."

Samuels grunted, and for the first time Christine realized he was there, too.

"Good work, Cagney," he said. He glanced about the place. "I'd like to see this fabulous outfit."

"Yes, sir." Christine brushed the glass off her and, spinning the clothes rack, watched for the plastic garment bag through which diamonds would show—glimmering in the moonlight. It didn't take long.

The next day, the whole crew did a massive cleanup job, and before the end of the shift Lacey and Cagney's desk was moved from the booking area outside to the area where Chris had first suggested—near the coffeepot.

"Well, we're off the John detail, at least."

Samuels came up to them. "You may be off John detail, but you've got other work to do now."

He handed them a folder.

Christine picked it up and read the cover page. "You've got to be kidding—investigation of a weight-loss-clinic scam?"

Samuels nodded. "It's all in a day's work, ladies. By the way—" He handed Cagney a small plant for her desk. "Thanks to you, it's Lieutenant Samuels now."

Cagney looked up at him and smiled. But he had already turned to his desk—too busy, or perhaps too embarrassed, to smile back.

H. C. McNeile

Thirteen Lead Soldiers

"**Y**ou mustn't touch them, Uncle Hugh, because they're still wet. Mr. Stedman is going to paint some more when he comes back."

Hugh Drummond—uncle by courtesy—looked down at the small boy on the floor. Around him was strewn the litter inseparable from small boys, be it trains, airplanes, or hairy bugs. In this case, the central motif consisted of toy soldiers, with paints and brushes and pools of multi-colored water. In addition, there were boxes of infantry, and cavalry, and guns all of a dull-grey color, whilst on a tray, resplendent in scarlet, stood some freshly painted heroes.

"Mr. Stedman says it's far more fun to paint them oneself," explained the proud owner. "He says it doesn't matter if there is no full dress no more."

"I quite agree with Mr. Stedman, Billy," said Drummond. "Red looks much better than khaki, doesn't it. That's a good-looking Highlander next door to the General on the horse."

"Yes. I've got some more of those. They're Cameron Highlanders."

"Not Camerons, old man. They might be Gordons."

"Mr. Stedman said Camerons," persisted the boy. "Didn't you?" He looked up as a tall, dark man entered the room.

"Didn't I say what, Billy?"

"Say these were Cameron Highlanders. Uncle Hugh says they're Gordons."

"Only after they're painted, son," said Drummond. "Before they're painted, they might be any Highland regiment."

"But Mr. Stedman painted him and he said he was a Cameron. Why can't he be a Cameron?"

"Because he's got the wrong-colored kilt on, old man. I might stretch a point and say he was a Seaforth, but I can't allow Cameron, I'm afraid. You see, that kilt gives the general impression of being dark-green, or even black, whereas the Cameron kilt strikes one as red."

"The complete Scotchman, I see," said Stedman with a smile; and Drummond glanced at him. There was no friendliness behind the smile.

"Even to the extent of always saying, 'Guid nicht the noo,'" he answered placidly.

"The color of a kilt seems a somewhat trifling matter to worry the child's head with."

Drummond raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"I don't suppose that it would materially affect Billy's future career if he was told that the Archbishop of Canterbury always preached in purple pajamas," he remarked. "At the same time, if you are painting soldiers and thereby giving the child a little lesson in things military, it does no harm to get such trifles as facings and kilts correct."

He lit a cigarette and strolled over to the window.

"The rain has stopped: I think I shall take exercise. I suppose the great ones are still conferring?"

"They are," said Stedman shortly—and with an amused glance at him, Drummond lounged out of the room. One of those tedious individuals, he reflected, who hate to be found wrong in anything. And yet able, presumably, or he wouldn't have his present job.

"Algy, you noxious blight," he remarked to Longworth, whom he found in the hall, "you may accompany me to the village. The evening paper should be in by now, and I want to see if I've backed my fifteenth consecutive loser. Tell me," he continued as they walked down the drive, "what do you think of the man Stedman?"

"I don't," said Algy, "if I can help it. Why?"

"I just wondered. We've been chatting on kilts and things and I don't think he was amused. Incidentally, painting toy soldiers is a new one on me."

"Same here. But the kid seems to like it. And I suppose it was decent of the fellow to go all the way to Manchester to get unpainted ones. What's this about kilts?"

"Nothing of importance," answered Drummond, halting for a moment and looking back at the house. "What a magnificent old pile it is."

Outlined against the westering sun, the towers and battlements of Oxshott Castle stood out dark and somber. Trees as old as the house flanked it on each side: in front lay a lake, placid as a sheet of glass. And as they looked, four men came through the front door and strolled across the drive.

It was easy to recognize them even at this distance. Slim and upright, their seventy-year, silver-haired host, Lord Surrey, came

first with the Frenchman, the Comte de Dinard. Behind them, the smoke from their cigars almost motionless in the still air, were the Belgian, Monsieur Meteren, with Sir Charles Dorking. And as they disappeared round a corner of the house, Drummond gave a short laugh.

"It's quaint, Algy, you know, when you think of it," he said. "At this moment the fate of Europe is quite possibly being settled: Stedman is painting toy soldiers for Billy, and you and I are going to see who won the two-thirty."

Algy looked at him anxiously. "You'll be quoting Ella Wheeler Wilcox in a moment, my lad," he remarked. "What you want is beer in a large can. And what has stung you now?"

Drummond, his eyes narrowed, was staring down the drive toward the lodge.

"I'd know that walk anywhere," he said. "If that isn't our old friend Andrews of Scotland Yard, I will consume my headgear. Now what the deuce is he doing here?"

They strolled on, and a few moments later the three men met.

"Good evening, gentlemen," cried the jovial-faced Inspector cheerily. "I was hoping I might meet you."

Drummond glanced at him in surprise.

"Very kind of you, old lad," he remarked, "and the same to you and all that. But may I inquire how you knew we were here?"

"Because I suggested that you should be asked," answered Andrews calmly. "When discussing the house party with his Lordship, it transpired that he knew both you and Mr. Longworth very well. So, as I say, I suggested that he should send you invitations for the weekend."

"Again very kind of you," said Drummond, looking even more surprised. "But why?"

"Because I may want your assistance," replied the Inspector. "What about a pint at the Barley-Mow, and I'll tell you the lay of the ground."

"A brave thought, bravely spoken," said Drummond. "By the way, d'you know what won the two-thirty?"

"Moonlight. Sharpshooter second."

"Hell!" said Drummond. "Another fiver down the drain. I shall soon be known as the bookmaker's friend."

They entered the bar, and found it empty.

"What about that table over in the corner?" suggested Drummond.

"I am frankly very curious, Andrews, to hear why you should have discussed the party with Lord Surrey."

"I suppose you're aware, Captain Drummond," said the Inspector as they sat down, "that some very important discussions are on foot at the present moment between England, France, and Belgium."

"I am," replied Drummond.

"That being the case, has it struck you as strange that a reporter isn't lurking behind every bush on Oxshott Castle?"

"It had not struck me up to date," admitted Drummond. "But now that you mention it, I get your meaning."

"The reason why they're not here," continued Andrews, "is that this conference has been kept a profound secret. The Press, of course, know that Meteren and the Comte de Dinard are in England. They know further that they are not over here to enjoy the English climate, but for the express purpose of meeting Sir Charles. And since the one thing the statesmen wished to avoid at the present stage of affairs was publicity, this weekend was arranged at Lord Surrey's suggestion. The whole plan was kept completely dark, and the very fact that there are no reporters here proves that we succeeded."

He paused and took a pull at his tankard, while the others waited.

"Yes, Captain Drummond," he repeated, "we succeeded—so far as the reporters are concerned—which, believe me, is no mean feat. But we have not succeeded entirely. Some unauthorized person knew of this conference four days ago."

"At any rate, he seems to have kept the information to himself," remarked Drummond. "Incidentally, how did you find out that somebody knew?"

"I'm coming to that," continued Andrews. "Four days ago, when I went to my office in the morning, I was as certain as a man could be that everything was all right. The only people who knew about the weekend were Lord Surrey himself, the three statesmen and their confidential secretaries—Mr. Stedman and the other two—and, of course, myself. I had fixed all the staff work over cars and, as I say, I felt quite confident that all was well. You can judge then my consternation when I received a letter by the second post that blew my optimism sky high. It was undated, bore no address, and naturally was not signed. And it ran as follows. 'Guard the Comte de Dinard at Oxshott. Guns are useless.'"

He took another pull at his beer.

"Short and pithy, you'll agree," he went on. "It gave me the devil of a jolt. To trace the writer was, of course, an utter impossibility,

even if there had been time. And there we were confronted with the fact that what we thought was a jealously guarded secret was nothing of the sort. So I went off posthaste to see Lord Surrey. Should we alter the arrangements, postpone the conference, or what?

"Well, postponement was out of the question: Mr. Meteren has to be back in Brussels on Monday. To alter arrangements would have been difficult since the Comte had just flown back to Paris and was only returning that night. So we decided to carry on—and do as the anonymous writer had suggested, guard the Comte. And it was then that I took the liberty, when I found out that his Lordship knew you both, of asking him to invite you. Your methods, Captain Drummond, may at times be irregular, but there are few people I would sooner have beside me if there's any trouble about than yourself." He made a little bow.

"Very nice of you to say so," said Drummond. "I should like to play."

"The trouble is," continued Andrews, "that I have no idea whatever as to what the game is likely to be."

"It's just possible," put in Algy, "that the letter is a hoax."

"Possibly, but not likely, Mr. Longworth. And even if it were, it doesn't alter the fact that somebody, inadvertently or otherwise, has spilled the beans. Because it's preposterous to think that any of the other seven people in the know could have sent me that note. No: I don't think that letter is a hoax. It is, I believe, a definite warning, sent by someone who has found out about this weekend, who knows that an attempt may be made on the Frenchman's life, and whose conscience has pricked him. You see, there's no secret about the fact that there is a large section of people in France, and in other countries, too, who would rejoice if the Comte was out of the way."

"Has he been told about it?" asked Drummond.

"He has. And pooh-poohs the whole thing. Takes the line that if people in his position paid any attention to threats of that sort they might as well chuck up the sponge straight away. Which is quite true. But the last thing I or Lord Surrey want is that the chucking up should occur here."

"Naturally," agreed Drummond. "You've got some men down, I suppose?"

"Four," said Andrews. "They're on the grounds now—they'll be in the house tonight."

"'Guns are useless.' I wonder what that means. Poison?"

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly. But unless he

eats or drinks something different to everybody else, the whole house party is in for it."

"Thanks," said Drummond with a grin. "What about the servants?"

"Been with his Lordship for years. Besides, it's inconceivable that one of them should have sent the note, or given the show away. It would mean that Lord Surrey himself had been indiscreet—otherwise they could never have known."

"Still, *somebody* has given it away," remarked Drummond. "And assuming what you've said to be correct, it must be one of you eight."

"My own belief is that it's the Comte himself," said Andrews. "Quite unintentionally, of course. He's one of those men who is reckless to the point of foolhardiness where his own safety is concerned. For all that, he's got to submit to some safety measures tonight, whether he likes it or not."

"Are they hush-hush?" asked Drummond.

"Not from you," said the Inspector, "though I don't want you to pass them on at present. But he's not going to sleep in the room he occupies now. He will dress for dinner there, and then just before he goes to bed a strange defect will be discovered in a fuse. Or else Lord Surrey will tell him the truth point-blank. He will sleep in another room, with one of my men outside his door, and I shall spend the night in his present one. Which may lead to us finding out something."

"You evidently take this as serious," said Drummond.

"I do. But in any case it's just as well to be on the safe side. And I think my arrangements, simple though they are, give the maximum of security with the minimum of inconvenience. If trouble comes from the outside, it finds me; if it comes from the inside, it has to pass one of my men."

"And what do you want us to do?"

"Keep your eyes open during the evening for anything that strikes you as being suspicious. I shall be on hand in one of the sitting rooms, if you want to get hold of me. And if the phrase 'Guns are useless' means anything in the nature of a rough house, you won't want any prompting," he added with a grin as he rose. "No, I won't have another, thanks. I must go and inspect my myrmidons. Probably see you later."

"So that's why we were honored, Algy," said Drummond as the door closed behind the Inspector. "I had hoped that my advice was going to be asked on high matters of state, but life is full of disap-

pointments. However, if we've got to do the Sherlock Holmes stunt, more beer is indicated. And then we'd better toddle back. But one wonders," he continued as another tankard was put before him, "why the letter-writer was so cryptic. Having gone to the trouble of saying what he did, why the dickens didn't he say more? Didn't he know himself, or what stung him?"

"It's that that made me suspect a hoax," said Algy.

"You frightful liar," remarked Drummond dispassionately. "You never thought of the point till I mentioned it. Now mop up your ale, and wipe your chin, and then you must go back and change your dickey. And for heaven's sake, don't tell old Dinard that French story of yours or all Andrews' precautions will be wasted. Though I admit," he added brutally, "that death could only be regarded as a merciful release from listening to it."

Any setting less suggestive of violence or murder than Oxshott Castle that night it would have been hard to imagine. They had dined in state in the large banqueting hall, a dinner which reflected credit on even Lord Surrey's far-famed chef—and the conversation at times had been amazingly indiscreet. It had taken the three diplomats a certain amount of time to understand the reason for Drummond's and Algy's presence, since by tacit consent no mention was made of the threatening note. The Comte especially appeared to think that Algy was mental—a skeleton in the family cupboard and Drummond his keeper—but the fact did not prevent him making one or two remarks that Fleet Street would have paid thousands for. And Meteren was not far behind in frankness.

It was a dinner to remember.

No women were present, and no other guests had been asked in. And as the meal progressed, Drummond found himself so absorbed in the glimpses—the human, scandalous glimpses—that lie at times behind the wheels of state that he almost forgot the real reason for his presence. And then, the drawn curtains—drawn ostensibly to keep out the mosquitoes—with the motionless bulges behind them on each side of the open window would bring him back to reality. For the bulges were two of Andrews' men, and two more were outside the door.

He was sitting between the Belgian minister and Mark Stedman, who seemed to have recovered from his temporary irritation of the afternoon.

"I had no idea, Captain Drummond," he said over the port, "that you were such a friend of Lord Surrey's."

"Hardly the way to put it," smiled Drummond. "His eldest son, who married my first cousin, and I were at Sandhurst together, and the old boy has asked me to shoot several times. Hence grandson Billy calls me uncle."

"Quite. I thought you were a sort of unofficial bravo brought in to help to protect our guest."

"You're perfectly right—I am. I shouldn't be here but for the anonymous threat."

"What's your opinion of it?" asked Stedman.

"I haven't one," said Drummond frankly.

"I saw Inspector Andrews before dinner, and he seems equally at sea. However, he's neglecting no precautions. Would it be indiscreet to ask what is your role?"

"Not at all," answered Drummond. "Since neither Andrews nor his merry men can actually join the party, my job is to keep my eyes skinned in the room itself for anything unusual that may happen."

"But what *could* happen?" said Stedman with an amused smile. "It sounds like the thriller of fiction: a secret death-dealing ray or something ridiculous of that sort."

"It does rather, I admit," agreed Drummond. "Certainly nothing could appear more removed from anything of that sort than the table at present."

"And yet," said Stedman thoughtfully, "it's an amazing thing how science has helped crime, though it sounds rather as if I were contradicting myself."

"It has helped the detection of crime just as much," Drummond argued.

"I wonder. I agree with you, of course, over crude commonplace crime, but in those cases the criminal is not availing himself of science, whereas the detective is. The crime I'm alluding to belongs to a higher category, and of necessity must be murder."

"Why, of necessity?"

"Because in burglary or forgery, let us say, however much science is employed in the committing of the crime, the criminal can only obtain his reward by a process where science is of no avail. He must go to a fence: he must pass his dud fivers. And it is in the disposal of his goods, a thing over which the technique is much the same as it was last century, that he gets caught. That does not apply to murder."

"Perhaps not. But since the time of Cain and Abel there is one thing that has always applied to murder, and no science can alter that."

"And supposing there is no motive."

"Then the murderer is a madman," said Drummond. "Or someone of the Jack the Ripper type."

"I will amend my remark. Supposing there is no motive that points to any particular individual."

"I don't quite get you," remarked Drummond.

Stedman hitched his chair a little nearer and lowered his voice.

"Let us take an academic case," he said, "our friend over whom the precautions are being taken tonight. Now the reasons why anyone desires his removal are nothing whatever to do with his private life. There is no question of love, or jealousy, or personal hatred pointing at a specific being and saying, 'Thou art the man.' The reasons are purely public and apply to his political views, which are intensely unpopular amongst thousands of people. That is why I say that if the Comte was murdered tonight, though the motive would be obvious, it wouldn't help the police to find the murderer."

"That's true," agreed Drummond. "And provided the crime was committed with such skill, that the criminal made a clear getaway and left no obvious clues behind him, doubtless he would never be discovered."

"Which is what I was getting at in the first place," said Stedman. "Fifty years ago, with the precautions that have been taken tonight, a getaway would have been impossible because the methods of committing the crime were so crude. Short of a gang of men overpowering the police and shooting him, or someone poisoning his whiskey, there was no method of doing the deed. Today that is not the case. And that is where science has helped the criminal more than the detective."

"I wonder if the Yard would agree with you," remarked Drummond with a smile.

"Somewhat improbable," grinned Stedman. "Though it doesn't alter the fact that it's the truth. I am firmly convinced that, given time, brains, and a sufficiency of money, it would be a comparatively simple matter to commit an undiscoverable murder."

"A good many people have thought the same thing and found they were wrong," said Drummond as they all rose from the table.

"And quite as many have found they were right," replied Stedman as they moved into the hall. "However, let's hope there's no question

of its being put to the test tonight. I've promised to finish two more soldiers for Billy, and high art of that sort requires a steady hand."

Certainly there had been no question of it when the house party reassembled about midnight prior to going to bed. The three statesmen had disappeared with their host into secret conclave. Stedman, refusing to join the others at drink, had devoted himself to things military in a corner of the billiard room. And now, as everyone helped himself to his own particular nightcap, he pointed with pardonable pride to the result of his labors.

Ranged in single file on a tray were the twelve gallant infantrymen and the field marshal on his prancing black horse. The command was small, Stedman admitted, for such an exalted officer, but any attempt to reduce him in rank had been firmly vetoed by Billy. And his actual position on parade was hardly according to the drill book. Instead of leading his Army into action, the cowardly old gentleman very nearly brought up the rear. Behind him strode a Greenjacket, a stout-hearted warrior leading an Army mule, and the sanitary squad in the shape of an R.A.M.C. orderly. The remainder of the force led by the drum major stretched out in front, glistening in their scarlet tunics.

"Don't touch," warned Stedman. "They're still wet."

"I don't envy the Highlander," laughed his Lordship. "It seems to me that the off fore of the field marshal's charger is down his neck."

"Specially arranged by Billy, sir," said Stedman. "The Highlander is the field marshal's own private guard."

He put the tray on the windowsill and glanced at Drummond.

"We compromised on the Black Watch," he laughed. "So honor is satisfied. Hullo—what has stung the Comte?"

He was gesticulating freely by the fireplace, and Lord Surrey was soothing him down.

"But, my dear fellow," cried the Frenchman, "it is absurd! I appreciate greatly your care for my safety, and the precautions of the good Inspector, but to change my bedroom because some madman has written a crazy note—it is surely ridiculous! You will be asking that I look under the bed next, like a hopeful old lady. However—if you insist, I can only obey my so charming host. I will go, I think now, if I may."

"What's all the excitement?" whispered Stedman to Drummond.

"One of Inspector Andrews' precautions," answered Drummond. "Even the servants don't know. The Comte's bedroom has been

changed, and Andrews himself is occupying the one he had originally. What on earth is the matter?" he added with a laugh. "You seem quite distressed about it."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Stedman. "Why should it distress me? Though I'm inclined to agree with the Comte as to its being most unnecessary."

"Perhaps. Still, it's as well to be on the safe side."

He turned away. Why had Stedman registered any reaction at all on hearing the news? It had only been momentary—gone in a flash—but to a shrewd observer like Drummond it had stuck out a yard. And how could it possibly affect Stedman personally if the Comte slept in his own bedroom or in the coal hole?

He sipped his drink thoughtfully, the conversation at dinner coming back to him. Also Stedman's annoyance over the matter of the kilt. Could it be possible that they were two widely different manifestations of the same failing—conceit? The kilt, irritability because he had been proved wrong; the other, a sort of inverted pride in something planned, and which he could not resist bragging about even though his audience should be unaware of the fact.

"'Old 'ard," muttered Drummond to himself, "you ain't even trotting—you're galloping. You're accusing this bloke Stedman of being the thorn in the flesh. And that's rot."

"Then why," came the reiterated question, "should he care the snap of a finger which is old Dinard's bedroom? And he did. Of that there's not a shadow of doubt."

He turned round to find Algy at his elbow.

"Coming to bed, old bird?" remarked that worthy. "I thought of taking up one of the pikes out of the hall in case a general action occurs during the night. The only thing against it is that a man impaled on the end of a pike would be a dreadful sight at three in the morning. He wouldn't go with my yellow pajamas at all well."

He looked at Drummond curiously. "What's stung you, Hugh? You seem devilish thoughtful."

"I'm just wondering, Algy, if I'm being a complete halfwit, or if I'm not. By the way, Andrews did say, didn't he, that one of his minions was going to be on guard outside Dinard's door tonight?"

"He did, and there he is. Further, there is one on guard in the corridor. I've just been up to fill my cigarette case and I saw 'em."

"Good. Then let's go to bed. I've probably got the mental jitters."

It was half an hour later that the door of Algy's room opened. He

had just smashed his tooth glass with his slipper, in an unsuccessful attempt to swat a mosquito, and was engaged in picking up the fragments when Drummond came in.

"Unless I'm much mistaken, Algy," he remarked quietly, "strange things will be abroad tonight."

The other one stared. "What sort of things?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Drummond. "So the curtain goes up on a completely unknown play."

"You annoying blighter," cried Algy, "can't you be a bit more explicit?"

"I can't," answered Drummond simply. "I give you my word of honor, I'm completely in the dark."

And he still was the following morning, when by ones and twos the guests drifted into breakfast. For nothing had happened in the night, except that, in common with most of the others, he had been bitten by a mosquito. Once in the distance he thought he had heard the sound of a motor being started and driven away; beyond that, nothing had occurred. And with the coming of dawn he had slept.

Breakfast over, he strolled out of doors—followed by an openly derisive Algy. And outside the open window of the billiard room, he paused and looked through at Billy arranging his Army, now dry, in new formations, whilst fresh victims were being prepared for Stedman's art. Then, still in silence, he walked on with Algy beside him.

"What *did* you think was going to happen, old boy?" asked that worthy for the tenth time. "Or what made you think that anything was going to happen?"

"The Cameron Highlanders," said Drummond. "Anyone who is sufficiently interested in toy soldiers as to paint them ought to know the color of their kilts. Hullo—what has Andrews got hold of?"

Coming toward them was the Inspector, with one of his men, holding in his hand what seemed to be a long, thin twig.

"Good morning, Captain Drummond," he cried cheerfully. "What do you make of this?"

On closer inspection, it proved to be part of the top joint of a salmon rod, snapped off about three feet from the end. But the interesting thing was the small attachment. About an inch below the top of the rod was a small muslin box, fastened securely to the rod. The box was about two inches square, and the framework was made of wood with the fabric stretched taut between. To one side was tied

a piece of fine string, which passed through the top ring of the rod in the fashion of an ordinary fishing line, and now hung trailing on the ground.

"As you can see," said Andrews, "when you pull that string, you open the box. And unless you pull the string, the box can't open because the lid is held in position by that bit of elastic inside."

"Where did you find it?" asked Drummond.

"Snapped off in the bush which is Jenkins' hiding place by day. Moreover, it was not there yesterday or he'd have seen it then."

"Which means it was broken off last night. Any footprints?"

"None. But with the ground like a board, one wouldn't expect any help in that direction."

"What do *you* make of it, Andrews?" said Drummond.

"Since it obviously didn't get there by itself, there must have been someone prowling around last night carrying the rod of which this is the top. In the darkness it got tangled up in the bush and snapped off, and whatever was inside here escaped. It was something, Captain Drummond, that he intended to poke up from outside through a window in the castle and allow to escape into the Comte de Dinard's room. 'Guns are useless,' don't forget. But when he broke his rod and the thing escaped, the whole plan failed."

"Somehow or other I don't think I'd have left that in the bush even if it was broken," said Drummond thoughtfully. "That little muslin box is beautifully made and could be used again on another rod."

"But he *did* leave it there."

"Yes. But I wonder if it was on the way to the castle. I wonder if by any chance he did just what you have suggested, then got alarmed or something and broke it on the way back, when the box was no longer of any use and he didn't mind losing it."

"Ingenious, my dear Captain Drummond, except for one point you overlooked. You forget that so far as any outsider could know, I was occupying the Comte's room. And you may take it from me that nobody flapped boxes outside my window last night."

"No, I hadn't overlooked it, old boy," said Drummond quietly. "Anyway, the great point is that the Comte's health, judging by his verbosity at breakfast, is quite unimpaired."

The Inspector looked at him curiously. "You're not satisfied, sir?" he said.

"I'm not," answered Drummond. "Though I daresay I shall prove utterly wrong."

"But what's stinging you?"

Drummond frowned. "The fact that the kilt of the Camerons is reddish in hue."

The Inspector looked at Algy. Algy looked at the Inspector.

"He'll be better after he's had some beer, Andrews," he said. "Captain Drummond gets taken like this at times."

That afternoon, the party broke up, and a few days later the whole episode was beginning to fade from Drummond's mind. He had made a mistake: his suspicions had been fantastic. In any event, the Comte de Dinard was still going strong in Paris, which was all that really mattered. No harm had come to him at Oxshott Castle—the worthy Andrews deserved full marks. And, so far as he knew, no harm had come to anyone else. So it came as almost a shock to him when, returning to dress for dinner one evening, he found the Inspector waiting for him in his sitting room.

"Have you a few minutes to spare, Captain Drummond?" he said gravely.

"Certainly, Andrews. As long as you like. I see," he added, "that something has happened."

"Something so strange that I have come straight to you. I remember that you were not satisfied when you left the castle, but at the time you would say nothing. Now you must."

"Go on," said Drummond quietly.

"Have you ever heard of yellow fever?" asked Andrews.

"I have. A tropical disease," answered Drummond, surprised.

"And a very dangerous one. It is fatal more often than not. Do you know how it is carried?"

"I can't say that I do," Drummond acknowledged.

"By mosquitoes." Andrews paused. "You may remember there were a good many mosquitoes at the castle," he continued.

"There were," agreed Drummond.

"You may also remember that little muslin box?"

Drummond nodded.

"And our theory as to what it was for? To let out something—we knew not what—into the Comte's bedroom?"

Once again Drummond nodded.

"We were right. And what is more, you were right when you suggested that the rod had been broken *after* the owner had been to the castle and not before."

"I was, was I?" said Drummond softly.

"That muslin box, Captain Drummond, contained mosquitoes carrying the germs of yellow fever. And the owner of the rod succeeded in reaching the castle and liberating those mosquitoes. Only he set them free in the wrong room. This afternoon Mr. Stedman died of yellow fever in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases."

There was a long silence, then Drummond rose and began pacing up and down the room.

"You may further remember," continued Andrews, "that you told me you hadn't overlooked the point when I alluded to the nocturnal visitor coming to my window. That now requires elucidation. Have you any idea as to why he went to Mr. Stedman's? Or was it a fluke?"

"It wasn't a fluke," said Drummond gravely. "I sent him there."

"You sent him there?" The Inspector shot out of his chair as if he had been stung. "What on earth do you mean?"

"You needn't think I took him by the hand and led him there," answered Drummond with a faint smile. "Until this moment I didn't even know he'd been there. In fact, I've never seen him or spoken to him. For all that, I sent him there. Listen, Andrews, and I'll tell you.

"You remember the billiard room, don't you, with its broad window sill? Before we went to bed that night, a tray of newly painted toy soldiers was placed on the sill. They had been painted by Stedman for the little boy, and we were all of us instructed not to touch them. They were arranged in single file—twelve infantrymen and one large man on a prancing horse. And one of the infantrymen was a Highlander in whom I was particularly interested, because of an argument on kilts that I had had with the artist. And my Highlander was placed so that he was just in front of the horseman.

"Then quite unexpectedly it was announced that the Comte de Dinard was going to change his room. He protested but complied, and everybody went to bed—everybody, that is, except me. I wasn't feeling sleepy, and I sat down in an alcove in the room with a book. I was practically hidden, so that when Stedman returned he didn't see me. And he crossed to the window, remained there a second, and then went out again.

"So after a moment or two, I also went to the window—and there I noticed a very strange thing. My Highlander, in whom I was so interested, had changed places with the field marshal!"

"Good heavens!" whispered Andrews.

"You see it, don't you?" said Drummond gravely. "Stedman neither knew nor cared anything about soldiers, but hearing that little Billy

did he thought of a darned original scheme for indicating the Comte's bedroom to someone on the outside. Soldiers that had to be painted and so couldn't be moved. A tray placed on the windowsill so that any man looking in from outside could see it and see where the field marshal was. Thirteen bedrooms were on our floor—thirteen soldiers were on the tray. And when the Comte moved into the next room—"Drummond shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder why Stedman wanted to have him murdered," he went on thoughtfully.

For a space, there was silence whilst Andrews stared at him.

"Stedman's bedroom was third from the other end," he said at length.

"I know. That's why the field marshal made yet another move. Just before I turned out the lights and went to bed, I placed two men in front of him. Have a drink."

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Tonita S. Gardner

A Girl Can't Always Have Everything

When Suzy Millette sat down to write her suicide note, she had no intention of killing herself. She only wanted to scare her husband into taking her back.

"How do you spell 'desperate'?" she asked—and while I was considering if the word had an "a" or an "e" after the "p" I must have looked so serious that she started to grin. "We've got to do this right or he'll never believe it's a matter of life and death." She winked at me and laughed so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks and she had to adjust a false eyelash.

"All kidding aside," she said when she'd recovered from her giggles, "I mustn't foul up again. Where would I find another money-machine like Herbert? Ugh, Herbert!" She sighed. "A girl can't always have everything."

Suzy seemed to have everything, and she usually got what she wanted. This time she wanted a young computer executive she'd met in a swingers' bar. He was part of the foul-up.

"Still and all," she concluded as she signed the letter and slipped it into an envelope, "there are certain times, my friend, when it's inconvenient to have a husband."

But Suzy had always felt this way, even in the beginning, three years before.

We were roommates then. We shared a small apartment in New York—a comfortable arrangement because we both had bit parts in the same off-Broadway play. Suzy's stage name was Suzy Starr—I used my real name, Patricia Lewis.

Through an actor friend of mine who knew some VIPs, Suzy convinced me to wangle an invitation to a swanky East Side party. I'd been told some movie people were going to be there, and when I mentioned this to Suzy she'd beamed at me and crossed her fingers. "Opportunity knocks, Pat—we could wind up in Hollywood!"

It was one of those stand-up cocktail affairs. Suzy immediately began to circulate. I decided to follow her example, and as soon as I spotted Herbert I was positive I'd found a real live producer. He certainly looked like one: big expensive cigar, balding head, paunchy

stomach. I was all set to say hello, but then I chickened out and went up to check my makeup.

When I got back Suzy was with him. (I couldn't blame her, it was every girl for herself.) But even though I lacked my friend's charisma, I watched her operate and had to admire her technique. Her dress was tight enough to show off her marvelous figure, and with her auburn hair, green eyes, and creamy white skin, she flattered a man just by giving him her undivided attention.

Herbert was enchanted.

It didn't take Suzy long to discover that our "producer" was actually a toy manufacturer—with factories in four states. He was also a widower and unattached.

"No wonder he can't take his eyes off me," Suzy confided when we met in the powder room. "He showed me a picture of his dear departed. A face like a broken-down bulldog!" She flashed her brilliant smile. "But this guy is loaded—and I don't mean from drinking."

When a huge bouquet of orchids arrived at our apartment the next day, Suzy knew Herbert was hooked—hers for the taking. And she took plenty. (Each time she came home with something new, Patty the Pauper tried her best not to drool.) At first there was a series of moderately expensive baubles, then it snowballed into a mink coat and a Thunderbird. ("Quite a haul for a small-time farm girl!" she gleefully informed me.)

Suzy wasn't hepped-up about marriage but, not wanting to lose her golden goose, she said yes. They were married in City Hall, and I was her only attendant. Afterward, while Herbert's luxurious penthouse was being completely redecorated for his lucky bride, the honeymooners settled temporarily at the nearby Plaza Hotel so Suzy could be available in case the decorator needed her.

As soon as the honeymoon was over, Suzy decided to rejoin the show, mainly because she was having an affair with the leading man. When he left for a more lucrative out-of-town offer, Suzy immediately lost interest in her theatrical career. "One thing about being married to a rich man," she snickered, "it makes a girl like me lose all her ambition."

"I'd be the same if I didn't have to pay rent every month," I told her, hoping she'd take the hint and spread the wealth.

Instead, she gave me a pep talk: "Your turn'll come, too, Pat. And when it does, milk it for all it's worth."

"Sure," I said, "but I'm hardly an expert like you."

"Then, for heaven's sake, *learn* from me! You're only on this earth for a few years—and if you don't grab in some goodies while you're still young enough and pretty enough, you certainly won't be able to when you're older."

At this time Hebert was forty-seven to Suzy's twenty-seven, but like a young passionately-in-love bridegroom he confessed his longing to become a father.

"Yich!" Suzy relived the scene for me. "It took all my self-control just to keep from upchucking my fifty-dollar dinner."

"What could you say, though?"

"I'm a better actress than you think, Pat. You should have heard us goooing together about our own little itty-babykins! But if he stuck it out with Dog Face for nineteen years and she couldn't have kids, he'll also stick it out with me when I give him the same bad news."

"Suppose you become pregnant?"

"Thank God for the pill! But isn't it a riot? He thinks I'm going to be a brood mare so he can have a son who looks like him"—and she pulled at her jaw to approximate Herbert's jowls. "He's got another think coming!"

Hebert had no way of knowing this. When I called up once and found him home with the flu, he told me Suzy was at her doctor's getting tested to find out why she couldn't conceive. "She wants to become a mother very badly," he said, sounding so wistful I actually felt sorry for him.

Of course, he also had no way of knowing that the M.D. Suzy was supposed to be consulting was really a chorus boy from a new musical on West Forty-fourth Street. As for the medical bills for her "treatments," no problem. Suzy knew an expensive Fifth Avenue doctor she'd gone out with a few times ("God, he had hands like an octopus!") who, as a special favor to her, was now willing to mail huge bills to Herbert, which the latter promptly paid. But in spite of her own numerous affairs, Suzy kept a shrewd eye on any attractive female with whom Herbert came in contact. Had she included me, I would have been flattered!

They say the husband is always the last to know, but Suzy managed so well Herbert might never have found out.

Except for one thing.

It started with a business trip of his down South. Since Suzy went with Herbert only on expensive vacations, she figured this was a

good chance to get away to Bermuda for a secret holiday with her newest, the computer executive. No one she knew ever went to Bermuda, and Herbert thought she was expected at the family farm in Wisconsin. ("Too bad you can't call me there, darling. The folks *still* don't have a phone.")

She packed her bags as soon as Herbert left, and three hours later she and her computer exec arrived at Kennedy Airport. But, unknown to them, Herbert's flight had been delayed because of a phony bomb threat, and when they entered the Eastern terminal arm in arm there was Herbert, almost ready to board his plane.

Suzy was so flabbergasted that for once in her life she didn't know what to say. Not that it would have mattered. Despite her blonde wig and dark glasses, Herbert's vision was 20-20. ("Oh, the look on his face, Pat! The look on his face!") He left on his trip, anyway. Suzy, too upset to continue on to Bermuda, went home alone.

That afternoon she called me—"I'm in a terrible mess, Pat!"—and after spilling the whole story she added, "While I stood there with my mouth hanging open, he told me that as soon as he gets back he's stopping at the house to collect his things. What should I do?"

She sounded so unhappy that I hurried to her apartment. By the time I got there, she'd regained her usual aplomb. Busily unpacking her suitcase, *she* tried to reassure *me*: "It's not as hopeless as it sounds, old pal—I've an idea that will work out perfectly. In three words. The sinner repents."

"How do you propose to do *that*?"

"By composing a suicide note." She smiled slyly. "I think I can scare Herbert into taking me back." She reached for some notepaper and a pen and began to write, thanking me profusely when I reminded her to make her hand quiver.

"What would I ever do without you, Pat?"

I smiled back at her. "Suzy, even *you* can't always think of everything."

"And I'm a lousy speller too."

"You need help? Ask me."

"How do you spell 'desperate?' " she asked—and while I was considering if the word had an "a" or an "e" after the "p," I must have looked so serious that she started to grin. "We've got to do this right or he'll never believe it's a matter of life and death."

Then, after going through her false-eyelashes and giggles routine and vowing not to foul up again, Suzy signed the letter and slipped

it into an envelope, concluding, "There are certain times, my friend, when it's inconvenient to have a husband."

Carefully, she addressed and sealed the envelope and was now ready to launch her plan.

"Listen closely, Pat. On Wednesday, right before Herbert's due back from his trip, I'll go to the Plaza Hotel, get myself a room there, and wait to hear from you. *Your* base of operations will be the drugstore near my apartment—they have plenty of phone booths. What you'll do is start calling Herbert, try to catch him the moment he comes home to pack up and leave for good. His plane lands about five-thirty, so figure he'll be home about seven. As an extra precaution, though, you can begin phoning at a quarter to."

"Why would I call him?"

"To make sure he's there! When he finally answers, hang up. Then, and only then, you can call me at the Plaza. And I can start timing everything."

"Such as?"

"Such as gulping down a bunch of sleeping pills."

"Whaat!"

"It's part of the plan. If you'll listen, I'll explain."

"Suzy, I'd be scared stiff if I were—"

"I am scared—a little."

"Then don't take those things. Just pretend to."

"Uh-uh. It's got to be as real as possible. That's why I'm working out every detail so that nothing can go wrong. Now, the moment you call me with the go-ahead signal, you *immediately* rush up to the apartment and give Herbert my note. Only you're not supposed to know what it says. Meanwhile, I'll wait about ten minutes, then take the pills."

"What do I tell Herbert?"

"Tell him that while you were out making your theatrical rounds, Suzy must have let herself into your apartment with her old key—because when you got home you found this sealed letter addressed to him in Suzy's handwriting, along with a memo to yourself saying, 'Dear Pat, Please see that Herbert gets this letter.' Of course, you'd be very puzzled by the whole business, and since you thought the letter *must* be important you hurried right over to give it to him. *Comprende?*"

"I'm beginning to."

"When he opens the letter—wham! And you'll have to pretend to be a little stunned yourself, Pat."

"I'm stunned already."

"Now, if he asks you where in the world I could be, you won't have the slightest idea. But don't ham it up—this is Academy Award time!"

"So how'll he know where to find you?"

"Easy. You'll suddenly remember that I once talked about wanting to recapture the past, or some such goop, and if the dodo doesn't pick up the clue, you then suggest the Plaza Hotel where he and I spent our happy happy honeymoon. Of course he'll grab the phone and ask if a Mrs. Millette is registered, and naturally the answer will be no."

"No? But I thought—"

"I can't use my *real* name, silly—it wouldn't look like the real thing. But he ought to be smart enough to also try my maiden name and/or my stage name, and if he isn't you drop another hint, and Eureka!—they'll answer that a Miss Starr is registered in Room so-and-so."

"So far, so great."

"And there's also another valid reason for picking the Plaza," she elaborated. "It's only a block away from our apartment. And since I'll have to gulp down a lot of pills to make the 'suicide' look good, I want to be sure he can get there as soon as possible to slap me awake, et cetera."

"How do you know he won't call for an ambulance instead? Or even call the police?"

"That's where *you* come in, Pat. Just shove him toward the door: 'Hurry, hurry! You've got to save her—I'll call a doctor!' and start dialing like crazy. Then when he leaves, you wait a few minutes, and to really play it safe you call good old Dr. Octopus, who's always dying to take my temperature. His office is near the Plaza, and on Wednesdays he has hours till nine. Hopefully, he'll get to me after Herbie Hero's already saved my life."

She looked pleased with herself. "See—no fuss, no muss, no scandal!"

"Suzy," I enthused, "it's terrific!"

"And by the way, Pat, I also plan to leave my hair loose, the way Herbert likes it best. But do you think I should wear a sexy black-lace negligee, or maybe a white silk—you know, something pure-looking?"

"Definitely the pure-looking."

Nodding her agreement, she handed me the envelope. "It's going to work like a charm."

Well, to make a long story short, as I said before, when Suzy sat down to write her suicide note she had no intention of killing herself.

But in life things don't always work out according to plan. Or do they?

May she rest in peace.

Of course, Herbert said I could have all her expensive clothes and designer furs, but I didn't want them—even though Suzy would think I was a dope for not taking whatever I could get.

"When any opportunity comes along, Pat, just grab it!" she used to say to me. And she was right. To prove it, I now have my own charge accounts at Bergdorf's and Saks Fifth under my new name, Mrs. Herbert Millette.

Yes, I learned a lot from Suzy. And I'm grateful. That's why I followed her instructions so carefully—right down to the letter.

Or should I say right *up* to the letter?

How clever of me to have stamped and mailed it.



Michael Arlen

Gay Falcon

Now of this man who called himself Gay Falcon many tales are told, and this is one of them.

It is told how, late one night not long ago, a pretty lady awoke to find a man in her bedroom, and how this outrage on her privacy started a train of most peculiar events which finally ended in as sensational a murder as you could wish to see.

But let us take one thing at a time.

Her dreamless sleep so rudely shattered, the pretty lady blinked in the sudden light which the intruder, behaving in a manner quite unsuitable in a decent burglar, had switched on.

"What is it?" she cried. "What do you want?"

She was surprised, not frightened. It took more than a man to frighten this pretty lady, as many a man had found. Flinging her bedjacket about her shoulders, her famous blue eyes, now so entirely devoid of the desire to please that photographers would have recognized her only with difficulty, regarded the stranger with surprise and contempt. But such treatment appeared only to nourish his disagreeable assurance.

"Lady, be good," he said. "Don't ring. Don't telephone."

It should be pointed out that the tall intruder must indeed have lacked all sensibility, for even when addressing the lady he did not remove his hat, which was of weathered felt, the color of rain on Piccadilly, and worn at an angle over his left eye which might have been called debonair anywhere but in a lady's bedroom.

"You are easy to look at," he said thoughtfully, "even without the makeup. Easy on the eye."

While these compliments were vulgar and ill-timed, they were deserved in full measure. The lady made a very pretty picture. Her bedjacket matched her bedspread, which was of white satin fringed with white ermine, while everything about her—hair, eyes, features, complexion—was of the very best and most attractive quality obtainable for women over twenty-five but under thirty.

But this lady's beauty can need no description when it is revealed that her name was Mrs. Temple, Diana Temple, of London, Paris,

and New York, one of the ten or maybe ten thousand best-dressed women in the world, excluding China and the Solomon Islands.

Of the fellow Temple, her husband, nothing can be said since nothing is known, apart from the fact that he had a brother. Once upon a time this brother had run away to sea, while Temple had married Diana, and neither was ever heard of again.

But the rude intruder made no attempt to conceal the fact that Diana Temple was no more to him than just another woman. As she swiftly stretched out a hand to her bedside table, he more swiftly put the telephone and bell-push out of her reach.

"Lady, be calm," he said. "This is the one occasion when Diana Temple is not going to do what she likes with a man. I don't want to get tough with you—so be good, my pretty."

Her lovely eyes widened with frank curiosity as she stared up at the man's dark, saturnine face. He was tall, his clothes were as you like it for an old suit casually worn, his face was long and lean and dark, and his eyes were deep, hard shadows.

"You are a strange burglar, I think," she said, "and somehow—"

"Somehow?" he said, and flicked off his hat.

"Why," she cried, "I've met you before!"

"Yes," he said. "We slept together through Lady Taura's dinner-party two weeks ago."

"We danced together, too," she said. "I remember—Gay Falcon. Your name is Gay Falcon!"

"I have others equally improbable."

"Tell me frankly, Mr. Falcon—do you enjoy being such a contemptible beast?"

"I enjoy the company of a woman of courage, Mrs. Temple. It relieves me that you take so lightly the fact that you are going to be robbed."

When she smiled you saw at once why men who were prudent with their wives pressed pearls and diamonds on Diana Temple.

"But," she smiled, "I am not going to be robbed. How silly of you to be so recognizable, Mr. Falcon. You *can* rob me, of course. But you will be arrested tomorrow."

"We shall see," said the man who called himself Gay Falcon. "Don't you remember something else about Lady Taura's party apart from the fact that we danced together?"

"Dear me," she said, staring, "her emerald! Of course—her lovely emerald, which was found to be missing next morning." She measured the man with a cold and detached curiosity which might have

mortified a less assured scoundrel. "You are a clever thief, Mr. Falcon."

"It was nice work, certainly. Of course, the stone is not worth the sum Lady Taura will collect from the insurance in due course—but still, it was nice work."

"I'm glad you are pleased, Mr. Falcon. It must be pleasant to make such a success of one's chosen profession."

"I haven't said I stole it, Mrs. Temple."

The saturnine stranger unsmilingly surveyed the spacious bedroom.

Mrs. Temple lost nothing of her poise when she saw that the thief's eyes had come to rest on her dressing-table. There, on a small tray of crimson velvet, like bright fruit fallen from the trees of an ambitious maiden's dreams, lay the necklace of rubies and bracelets of rubies and clips of rubies she had worn at dinner.

"You won't really mind my taking those," he said, "since they are so well insured."

"Since you know so much, Mr. Falcon, you will know that the insurance cannot repay me for their romantic and sentimental value."

The man glanced at her with a queer cold smile, and Mrs. Temple felt really uneasy for the first time. "In that case," he said, "I won't take them. Observe my big heart."

She heard herself, and with infinite surprise, laughing unsteadily.

"Then you must go away empty-handed, Mr. Falcon, for everything else is at my bank."

The tall man's eyes had come to rest on the only picture in the austere room. This was a small Italian primitive, the color still bright on the cracked wood, of the Virgin Mary with the Child, and it was let into the wall just beside the bed behind the bedside table.

And as the man approached the primitive set into the wall, Mrs. Temple, the calm and remote Mrs. Temple, stared at him with suddenly uncontrollable terror.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "No—please!"

"I fancy," he said, reaching out a hand past the telephone to the lower right corner of the primitive, "I fancy, Mrs. Temple, that you won't tell the police about what I am going to do now."

She fought him with all her strength. Quite silently, but for bitter little sighs of feminine despair, her lovely features distorted with fear, she beat her arms frantically against him in a vain attempt to prevent him from opening the little secret safe in the wall.

But when she had done all she could, she regained her practiced dignity. She did not look to see what he was taking from the secret safe. She lay very still and stared up at the ceiling with wide open eyes that seemed to be counting some ghosts that walked there.

He looked back at her from the door and was about to say something. Then he saw how she lay still and looked to be counting ghosts that walked across the ceiling and he went out without a word.

She was the most frightened woman he had ever seen, and it was interesting to wonder why, since it was not of him that she was so frightened.

On the following morning, the activities of the man who called himself Gay Falcon were surprising in a simple burglar.

Passing through the imposing doors of a very large new building on Pall Mall, known to all the world as the headquarters of Universal & Allied Assurance, he was immediately taken up to the handsome boardroom. It was just one minute after noon.

Nine gentlemen appeared to have been awaiting his entrance. Of these, a few were directors of Universal & Allied, while others represented important firms of underwriters and assessors. The sulky features of the ninth gentleman were recognizable to readers of popular newspapers as being those of Chief-Inspector Poss of Scotland Yard. As he sat on the boardtable, he made no secret of the fact that he disapproved strongly of his present situation and was quite unprepared to change his mind in the near future.

The man called Falcon had with him a small but evidently well filled leather satchel. He slid this with an expert shove down the length of the long table to the handsome grey-haired gentleman who sat at its head.

"There you are, Mr. Hammersley. In the last few years, your people and other underwriters have paid out close to a hundred thousand pounds in claims on the lost or stolen jewelry represented by that little lot."

It was only Chief-Inspector Poss who examined the jewelry with any degree of close attention. The others merely glanced at it, some with inexperienced eyes, while their interest was centered on the tall, lean figure of Falcon.

"If that is the case," said Mr. Hammersley, "as it very probably is, your commission of five percent will come to five thousand pounds, which is very nice money, Mr. Falcon."

"When you hired me, Mr. Hammersley, did you think you were hiring a nursemaid?"

"Oh, we are not complaining," said a large smiling, ruddy man.

"Thank you very much," said Gay Falcon. It was obvious that he was not a man who would have succeeded in politics, where charm of manner is said to be an advantage.

"And now," said the smiling, ruddy man, "perhaps we can hear how you have managed to succeed so quickly where the police have so consistently failed."

Falcon's hard, unsmiling eyes flicked over the Chief-Inspector, who, bent over the table, was still examining the jewelry. Then his gaze went back to the large ruddy man with the twinkling blue eyes. This was Mr. Harvey Morgan, always known as "Chappie" Morgan, a very successful financier and popular sportsman. It was apparent from Falcon's expression that he thought more amiably of Chappie Morgan than of his associates.

"Well, what's your story?" said handsome Mr. Hammersley sharply.

"My father was a dentist in Leicester and my mother died when I was a child. Shortly afterward I decided to leave home and become an engine-driver, but owing to—"

"We asked you, Mr. Falcon, for your story about this recovered jewelry."

Chappie Morgan gave a loud bark of laughter.

"Listen Hammersley," said the man called Falcon, "you people hired me because the police failed to justify reasonable suspicions that underwriters were being cleverly robbed. I have confirmed your suspicions and returned part of the jewelry. I am not a policeman. I am not a storyteller. I am a man who makes a living by keeping his mouth shut. The money due me should be paid into my account at Barclays Bank, Piccadilly branch."

Chief-Inspector Poss looked across the table very steadily. "That won't do, Falcon."

"Mister Falcon, Chief-Inspector. What won't do?"

"Gentlemen," said the Chief-Inspector to the board, "I told you a month ago that it was highly irregular to give a free hand in this matter to a man like this Falcon—"

"Mr. Flatfoot," said Gay Falcon, "one more crack from you and I'll give the whole story to the newspapers, then you and your efficient detectives will be looking for jobs as film-extras."

"Better be a good boy, Poss," grinned Chappie Morgan.

"I am not easily frightened, gentlemen. But now you will appreciate why I warned you against engaging *Mister Falcon*. This stuff is stolen jewelry, some of it very famous jewelry. And we know for a fact that not one little bit of it has passed through the hands of any fence in England. You are taking a grave risk, gentlemen. If we don't hear from this man Falcon how he has managed to succeed where the police have failed, you share with him the risk of being charged with aiding and abetting a receiver of stolen jewelry."

"Quit kidding," said Falcon. "It's their property, isn't it, since they've paid all claims on it? Try arresting them for receiving back their own property and see how you like it."

"But *you* can be charged, *Mister Falcon*, for all sorts of misdemeanors, I make no doubt. Now behave yourself and help the police by telling me how you recovered this property."

"Brains," said Falcon. "Naughty boy, where are yours?"

The Chief-Inspector's grim face had reddened and he was about to retort in a manner unworthy of the high traditions of Scotland Yard when Mr. Hammersley intervened with practiced authority.

"I'm afraid, Chief-Inspector, that while we must agree with you that Mr. Falcon's attitude is highly irregular, we cannot encourage you to take any action against him. It was with your knowledge that we engaged him to recover this jewelry, which the police had failed to find for two years."

"And now," said Chappie Morgan, "Scotland Yard is angry because Falcon won't give away his little secret."

"The law," said Chief-Inspector Poss, with commendable restraint, "does not acknowledge secrets in respect of other people's stolen property. This man Falcon's position requires investigation." He picked up a jewel from amongst the heap on the table. "Now here is the famous Taura emerald, which Lady Taura reported as stolen or missing two weeks ago—"

"Insured at nine thousand pounds," said someone.

"Yes. And here it is, recovered. But how? It was stolen at or after a ball given by Lady Taura. And you were there, *Mister Falcon*."

"Does the fact that I dance better than you do, Chief-Inspector, mean that I'm a criminal? Now let me tell you all something. These insurance claims for lost and stolen jewelry from society people over the last two years and more have been part of a very clever racket. I want to find out who is behind this racket. When I do, I'll maybe talk. In fact I promise to talk. Good day to you, gentlemen. Good day, Chief-Inspector."

"You're asking for trouble, Falcon. Remember, there's an unsolved murder somewhere behind these thefts—that of Stella Bowman last year. I warn you again, Falcon."

"It's years and years, Chief-Inspector, since I burst out crying because a policeman didn't like me."

Now it is on record that no well known beauty can long survive the rigorous life of being a well known beauty day in and day out if she does not acquire the courageous gift of being able to "put off" engagements at more or less the last minute. Mrs. X regrets that she is unable to dine because she has a headache and is going to bed with a boiled egg. Mrs. X regrets that she cannot lunch today because her doctor has forbidden her to go out.

They always sound like lies. They usually are lies, but people are eager to forgive lies who will find the truth intolerable. For while it is true that people do not like to be put off, it is also true that those people who are by nature liable to be put off invariably live to fight another day for yet another engagement with the same inconsiderate guest.

Therefore Mrs. Temple had little hesitation, that very afternoon, in telephoning to Lady Soda's house and regretting that she could not dine that evening with Sir Theodore and Lady Soda owing to this and that.

The fact that she was dining with the man who called himself Gay Falcon, who had telephoned that afternoon in the most casual manner imaginable, was nobody's business but her own. Anyway, Mrs. Temple knew, for she was a student of worldliness in all its nasty little niceties, that Sir Theodore and Lady Soda would inevitably invite her again.

She met Mr. Falcon at a small restaurant near Jermyn Street which had recently become well known to thinking men of the wealthier sort for its serious attitude in matters of importance. As always, she wore her slender cool beauty with that faint air of detached amusement which is the natural gift of women born to enchant others but never to deceive themselves.

Mr. Falcon had taken care they should not be overheard by engaging a corner table. The black-and-white effect of his dinner-jacket emphasized his dark saturnine face and deep eyes and greying hair. It also became apparent to a close observer that he knew how to laugh at many things.

She said: "Dear me, for an ugly man you are really quite good-looking."

"Just wait," he said, "till you get the lowdown on my kind heart as well, and then you will wonder where I've been all your life. I haven't ordered any dinner, since you never know what a pretty woman will eat, if at all. Have some melon. Have some caviar. Have a steak and onions. Have some grouse. Diana Temple, you are a very pretty woman. Have what you like."

"How nice it is," she said, over dinner, "to be with someone with whom I don't have to pretend anything. Dear me, I am a thief. I am a bad woman. Now you know about me—what about you? What are you? Who are you?"

"And why," he smiled darkly, "did I do to you what I did last night?"

"Yes, why?"

"Diana, I'm a man who has done many things. I've been a soldier, a gambler, a secret agent, an airplane salesman, a white hunter, a purser, a husband, a co-respondent, a war-correspondent, a long-distance swimmer, a professional dancer, a good salmon-fisherman. I have no rheumatism, no patience, and no money. For further information apply to Scotland Yard for free booklet on the man called Gay Falcon."

"No money? Then how do you make a living?"

"By engaging in dangerous enterprise—and I've not been killed—yet."

"But I am not a dangerous enterprise, Mr. Falcon. Why did you engage yourself in my business?"

"Mrs. Temple, some more grouse?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Falcon."

"Then just one more potato? What is one more potato to a figure like yours? Have I told you that I was once married to a woman in New York with a figure just like yours, but she—"

She said, "Mr. Fortune, why did you, who engage in dangerous enterprises, pick on me?"

Over the rim of his wine glass, his sardonic eyes, now unsmiling, regarded her fair face intently. Her gaze did not waver, but that meant little to a man who knew from experience that liars and thieves and killers can look you straighter in the eyes than many an honest man.

"Then I shall ask you a question, too," he said. "Why were you so infernally frightened last night?"

"Frightened?" She smiled with a wavering uncertainty that made her beauty poignant. "But isn't it natural—when a strange man bursts into a woman's—"

"You were not," he pointed out, "frightened of me."

Her eyes fell slowly, and she seemed to be counting the little bright bubbles in her wine glass.

"There is someone in your life, Diana Temple, of whom you are very frightened. For you love life, and you are frightened for your life. And it is because I am out to find and catch that someone that this is a dangerous enterprise."

Very still, her eyes gave and absorbed, she said nothing. Then she shivered a very little. She did not look at him.

"I don't want," she whispered to the last bursting bubble in her glass, "to die."

"It would be a pity, I agree. Let me tell you a story, Mrs. Temple. There are a number of wealthy and respectable women in this world who are now and then in need of hard cash. Perhaps they have lost too much at racing or at cards or owe their brokers more than they can pay. Perhaps husbands or trustees simply will not pay up again.

"They are not women who would willingly do anything criminal. Looking around for money, they see only their jewelry. They think of selling a ring or bracelet, but if they try to sell to a well known jeweler they fear their husbands will find out or their credit will be damaged, and from an obscure merchant they can hope only for a very poor bargain.

"There is the insurance. Fine jewels belonging to individuals are invariably insured at their replaceable value and not at what you or I could sell them for at second-hand. Therefore, they will get very much more from the insurance than from selling the stuff, even if they knew how.

"But the very fact that insurance companies can exist and thrive is due to something fundamental in human nature—that the vast majority of people are honest, that a small number would be faintly dishonest if not frightened of the law, while only a very small percentage are really dishonest.

"So the respectable women I speak of would not dream of cheating the underwriters by throwing a ruby into a lake, while some would like to but daren't for fear of breaking down when answering the searching questions of practiced investigators.

"Then one day along comes the answer to their troubles. Let us say that a Mrs. de Courcy Fish, well known to readers of unimportant papers as an important person, owes her bookmaker a thousand quid. She daren't tell her old man because he is hard up himself and she has promised never to gamble again. Her bookmaker is getting nasty, like in the storybooks. And then one day a voice on the telephone tells her just what to do to raise the wind.

"Mrs. de Snooks Fish," says the voice, 'don't worry about your debts. Yes, I know all about you. All you have to do is to claim the fifteen-hundred insurance on that ruby ring you have lost.'

"My ruby!" she cries. 'But I haven't lost it. I've never lost anything.'

"Oh yes, you have, madam. You have lost your ruby tomorrow night at Delsarto's, where you and your husband have supper so often after the theater. You were sitting—tomorrow night—at your usual table, and somehow owing to a slight scratch on your finger your ring was bothering you. So you put it, or you thought you did, beside your plate and—really very stupidly—forgot it there for a few minutes while you got up to dance. Or if your husband didn't want to dance tomorrow night, you went to powder your nose. Anyway, some ten minutes or so after you got back, you missed the ring. But being uncertain whether you really had taken it off or whether it had dropped off your finger while dancing and so on and forget this talk and I am so sorry you have lost your ruby tomorrow night and good-day to you, madam.'

"That, Mrs. Temple, is more or less how this insurance racket started. One clever thing about it was that the people who put in claims for lost or stolen jewelry had never or very seldom lost anything before, and so were and are rated as first-class risks. And another clever thing was that the women concerned really did delude themselves that they really had lost or mislaid or dropped the stuff, as indeed they had, in one way.

"That is my story, Diana—and your story, too."

Watching her, he did not help her light her cigarette. Carefully, she blew out the match, and for a long minute stared at its burnt tip.

She said: "How did you find me out?"

"I have been interested in you for some time. I wondered how you had enough money to live and dress as you do, since your husband disappeared years ago."

"My uncle—" she said.

"My uncle my eye, beautiful. Then I watched you at Lady Taura's party. She has a large income, but I happen to know she has to pay her broker five thousand pounds soon or be sold out of her American securities. She had her emerald at dinner. She had it at midnight. She did *not* have it after she had gone into the library for a gossip with the Home Secretary—though she didn't seem to notice her loss until the next morning. Well, a hostess has much on her mind. But I saw the emerald, and left it where it had apparently slipped from her finger between the cushions of the sofa on which she had been chatting with the Home Secretary—and on which, later on, you were flirting with that young ass, Chubby Wimpole."

She looked at him steadily.

"You win," she said. "What are you going to do? Why haven't you told the police already?"

"Because you are only a frightened minnow, beautiful. What good will it do to put you behind bars? I want to catch the shark. And so I shall catch him, or know why."

She was intent on crushing out her half smoked cigarette.

"Don't!" she whispered. "Leave him alone." Suddenly, never looking at him, she spoke very quickly. "Yes, I am frightened. He's a killer. Leave him alone, Mr. Falcon. I warn you. He doesn't know yet—I dare *not* tell him—that you've taken the stuff from me. He's retiring from business next week. Then he comes to collect my lot—it's less than half of what there is in all—and starts on his travels, a retired and rich business man, to South America. Leave him alone, Gay Falcon. There's only one life."

"What about yours? What shall you do?"

She smiled faintly. "Diana Temple," she said, "has taken a suite at the Ritz in Paris as from tomorrow. Perhaps you will dine with me there very soon, Mr. Falcon? Yes, I'm running away—from fear, crime, everything." Her fingers, diving quickly into her vanity-bag, as quickly slipped a small packet of tissue-paper into his hand. "You missed this last night. Put it among your collection. Then you have done all you were hired to do and can take a holiday."

Shielded by the tablecloth, he examined the clip in his palm—a magnificent square emerald set in baguette diamonds.

"Lost or stolen," he said, "two nights ago at the Avalons' dance in Belgrave Square. I see. Thank you, Mrs. Temple." He tossed the tissue-paper on the table, and slipped the clip into his pocket. "Now go home, beautiful. And I hope you mean what you say about running away. I don't like your friend, and if he should think the police

are after you and that you might talk, then it will be a poor lookout for your dressmakers."

Her clear wide eyes, still poignant with hidden fear, regarded him thoughtfully. "Why don't you," she said slowly, as though each word was an ordeal, "try to force his name out of me?"

"Because I've guessed it. Because I don't want you to be bumped off before you dine with me again—I'm particular about women, and I prefer them alive. Because I want better evidence than my guess or your word. Because it's bedtime. Good night, Diana."

She almost snatched up her bag and, as though she couldn't trust herself to say another word, left him very quickly. Had she glanced back from the restaurant door, she would have surprised a look of queer anxiety on his usually saturnine face. The man called Gay Falcon had never in his life made a secret of the fact that he wished pretty women well, no matter what they might wish for him.

Not ten minutes later, he let himself into his flat in St. James's Square nearby. He showed no surprise at finding two visitors comfortably awaiting him in the sitting room. One of them was Chief-Inspector Poss and the other was a beefy type whom even a blind thief would instantly have recognized as a detective.

"We rang the bell," said Poss innocently, "but as nobody answered and the door was ajar, we just came in to wait for you. This is Detective-Sergeant Daisy, but his name does him an injustice."

Gay Falcon, still standing, looked slowly around, glanced into his bedroom, then looked at the Chief-Inspector with a smile in his deep hard eyes which would have done credit to a tiger suddenly confronted by a man with a niblick.

"You've got some cheek, Poss," he said amiably enough. "I'm sorry you've had your search for nothing."

"Not quite nothing," said the Chief-Inspector with satisfaction. "You'll have to explain these in due course." He took three passports from an inside pocket and held them up. "Three passports, one for a man of independent means called Gay Stanhope Falcon, one for a soldier called Colonel Rock, who looks quite a bit like you, and one for a journalist with an address in Paris called Spencer Pott, who would be your twin brother but for his moustache. You will have to explain these, *Mister* Gay Stanhope Falcon."

Detective-Sergeant Daisy appeared to have formed a high opinion of his superior's sense of humor and Falcon had to wait for his rugged laughter to die down before he said, "You'll have to do your own

explaining tomorrow morning, Chief-Inspector, when you get a telephone call, as I fancy you will, from General Icelin. But don't let me interfere with your evening out. What do you want?"

The Chief-Inspector was looking at him thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Falcon, I shan't be a bit surprised to find that you are or have been military intelligence. You've got that nasty look back of your eyes which one associates with M.I. I'll give these passports back at one word from the right quarter, don't worry about that. What is worrying me is your attitude about this jewelry affair. Look here, Falcon, I'd much rather have you working with me than against me or on your own."

Falcon, his hands in his pockets, looked unsmilingly from one to the other of the two burly detectives.

"You didn't break into my flat to hand me a bouquet, Poss. What brought you here? A telephone message—about an hour ago?"

Both the Chief-Inspector and his subordinate started with surprise.

"We'll go into that later, Falcon. Now listen, and take it easy. We've got to search you. You can refuse—then you come along with us and we'll search you all according to law. But it will be simpler if you allow us to search you here."

Falcon's eyes went to the telephone for a quick second. Then he said: "Go ahead, but be quick. You and I are going to be busy to-night."

The two detectives, with Falcon's help, were quickly finished, finding nothing more than any man's usual belongings.

Poss sighed. "It was too good to be true. We received information to the effect that you would have in your possession the emerald-and-diamond clip stolen at Lady Avalon's dance the other night."

Falcon looked deadly serious. He snapped, "If you had found it, what would you have had to do?"

The Chief-Inspector stared, puzzled by Falcon's expression. "As far as anyone would know—anyone who might not know that we *might* be on your side—we would have to hold you pending full inquiries. You'd be charged first, of course." He added sharply, "What's up, Falcon? What's on your mind?"

Falcon said, "Wait a minute." Pacing up and down, he appeared to come to a conclusion, and stood facing the Chief-Inspector.

"Poss, the man who tried to frame me tonight didn't think the charge would stick—he's too clever for that. But he *did* think it

would keep me quiet for a few days—so that he could get clear of the country. He's frightened. And he's dangerous."

"You mean," Poss said, "that these insurance thefts are tied to—"

"They're tied to murder. You were reminding me this morning of that pretty Mrs. Bowman who was found strangled in her flat one night last year. She was going to give certain information about stolen jewelry to Scotland Yard the next day, wasn't she?"

Poss said, "Apart from just one blurred fingerprint on a tumbler, we didn't get within a thousand miles of whoever killed Stella Bowman."

Falcon said, "Get this. If you do exactly as I say for the next hour or two, you'll put handcuffs on the owner of that fingerprint, the brain behind this insurance racket, and the killer of another pretty woman like the well known Mrs. Bowman."

The Chief-Inspector reddened. "Another? What's this, Falcon? Who is it?"

"Take it easy, Poss. This murder won't come off. Now will you do as I say?"

The Chief-Inspector, glancing at his subordinate, said, "Go ahead, Falcon. You'll back me up, Daisy? We can but try. This chap Falcon knows a hell of a sight more about this than we do—perhaps more than is good for him. It certainly would be nice to get that Bowman strangler."

They sat in watchful silence while Falcon dialed a number. When he heard Diana Temple's voice, he said: "Listen, beautiful, your little play didn't come off."

She gave a little shivering gasp.

"I know," he said softly, "I know how frightened you are. Listen—"

"But if," she gasped, "he finds out that the police aren't holding you and that you've given them my name and they're going to question me, he will come and—"

"The police are here with me, after searching me without success. You should have told me at dinner that he'd instructed you to frame me. Then I could have taken steps to see to your safety. But it's not too late now, if you'll do what you are told."

"But—but what *did* you do with the clip?"

"You'll find it at the bottom of your bag, where I slipped it back. I trust nobody, sweetheart. Now, for your own safety, will you follow my instructions to the letter?"

"Yes—oh, yes! I can't face him when he finds you really are after him."

"You will have to face him, Diana, because he will come to see you very soon. He has a key, of course? I'm going to let him know in the next few minutes that the police are to question you in the morning."

"But you mustn't—you can't! You're telling him to kill me, like he did—"

"Be calm, lady. You'll be better protected than Stella Bowman. Now do as you're told. Go to bed immediately."

"Yes? And?"

"That's all. Just go to bed. And wait. Just wait. Read a nice thriller, if you like."

She laughed unsteadily. "I thought better—of you—than to make fun of my fears."

"Don't worry—I'm going to cure you of your fears forever. Trust in me, beautiful."

He snapped down the receiver and turned to the Chief-Inspector, who was glaring at him. "You're risking a woman's life, Falcon—even though she is an accomplice."

"One moment, Poss. If you're going to arrest this woman—and you've no idea who she is yet—I go no further with this business. This girl is dining with me in Paris the day after tomorrow, and I simply won't have my evening messed up, and that's flat."

"One thing at a time, Falcon. All right, don't fly off the handle. Now, how are you going to let the big man know we're after this dame?"

"You are going to let him know, Poss. It is now eleven. Mr. Harvey Morgan, known as Chappie, is at his desirable residence in Grosvenor Street nearby giving a men's dinner. Ring him up right now and tell him, just as a matter of interest, that you were given some bogus information about that man Falcon tonight, that you've searched him without success for stolen property, that Falcon has promised to work with you and has given you the name of a lady whom you're going to question first thing in the morning, and that you're ringing him up just to tell him and other directors of Universal & Allied that you'll have some interesting information to give them at noon tomorrow. Snap to it, Chief-Inspector."

"Holy smoke!" said Poss. "Chappie Morgan, is it! This is going to make the headlines all right. Chappie Morgan! I always wondered where he really came from."

"Last year," said Detective-Sergeant Daisy with relish, "I made a nice little bit on a horse of his at Gatwick. The bookmakers are

going to take a day off when Chappie hangs. It's said he's won packets and—"

"That's enough of your low gossip, Daisy," said the Chief-Inspector severely. "Now, Falcon, this Mr. Harvey Morgan is an important man. You really mean me to ring him up and—?"

Gay Falcon showed his teeth in a grin which lacked even the pretense of amiability. "You must introduce me to your mother, Poss, so I can ask her if you were bumped on the head when you were a child. Now get busy, man, before that dinner-party breaks up."

When the Chief-Inspector had spoken his piece to Harvey Morgan, he turned a jaundiced eye on Gay Falcon.

"If his reactions to that rigmarole," he said bitterly, "weren't those of an innocent man, I'll—I'll disguise myself as a policewoman."

"What did he say?" said Falcon.

"First, he chuckled himself silly, and then—"

"I've known a laughing murderer," said Sergeant Daisy. "He had some kind of gland trouble and—"

"You shut up," said the Chief-Inspector violently. "And then, when I tell Chappie that juicy bit about the important information I'm going to give them at noon tomorrow, he says he always knew Gay Falcon was a clever chap with a mind so crooked that he could see round corners, and he congratulates us all."

"Right!" said Falcon briskly. "Now, Poss, if you can be serious for a moment, put on that awful bowler of yours and follow me. Either of you got a gun?"

"No, we haven't. We're policemen, not gentlemen detectives."

"Okay. Sailors can't swim, either."

Falcon snatched an automatic from a drawer and was slipping it into his pocket when Poss said, "I'll have that, mister. You've a license, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," said Falcon savagely. "Mussolini himself gave it to me to use as a toothpick whenever I felt extra peaceful after meals."

Mrs. Temple's apartment was on the fourth floor of one of those handsome new blocks of flats which try very hard to look like imposing homes for rich people and succeed in looking like hospitals for rich people being treated for loneliness.

The bedroom window of each flat gave out onto a small balcony. This was not strictly a balcony but in the nature of a decoration,

and therefore it was a somewhat tight fit for the substantial figures of the two detectives and Gay Falcon.

Mrs. Temple, whose maid slept in the domestic quarters, had let them in and passed them through her bedroom to the hideout on the balcony. She had tried to smile at Falcon, but she had confessed to wishing he had thought of trying some other method of catching his shark.

Chief-Inspector Poss, squeezed into a corner of the balcony, was not in the best of tempers. For one thing, it was a chilly night, and for another, he didn't like being on balconies.

"We'd look darn silly," he said sourly, "if this thing gave way and we fell into the square like a ton of Juliets in trousers."

"We're only doing our duty, sir," said Daisy, who was enjoying himself.

The bedroom window was ajar so that they could hear anything that passed in the room. The thick curtains were not drawn, but the white net across the windows was sufficient to make the visibility poor. Still, the watchers on the tiny balcony could see everything in outline, and they could hear the slightest sound. Mrs. Temple was in bed, her eyes on a book.

"I don't like this," said the Chief-Inspector. "Suppose he pulls a gun on her before we can stop him?"

"It would be tough luck on her, wouldn't it?" said Falcon. "She certainly makes a pretty picture."

Suddenly the bedroom door was seen to open noiselessly. The watchers stood rigid, Poss with the automatic in his hand. A man came in, a tall bulky shape. Mrs. Temple, unaware, still had her eyes on her book.

"Well, Diana?"

The start of surprise with which she put down the book was, considering how frightened she must be, a pretty piece of acting.

"Harry! What is it—why have you come tonight, when you said—?"

He came toward the bed and his face became clearer to the watchers on the balcony. Chief-Inspector Poss turned startled eyes on Falcon.

"Diana," the man said conversationally, "I'm afraid I have bad news for you. But in a way it's your own fault for not having managed to frame Falcon and give me time to get away."

"But I tried to, darling, only he must have suspected and—"

"I know, I know. Luck is good or bad. It's bad now, Diana—for

you. Falcon has been very clever. It was that fool Morgan who insisted on engaging him for this investigation, and now he knows a sight too much. I was dining with Chappie tonight when the police rang him up to say that they're going to question you in the morning, and I fear, Diana, that I can't risk that. Of course, a wife can't give evidence against her husband, but she can—if she hates going to prison as much as you do—give the police a lot of very dangerous information."

Detective-Sergeant Daisy, more pop-eyed than ever, stared at Poss and whispered, "Lumme, 'Arry Temple in the flesh! I 'ad my suspicions of 'im ten years ago, just before he vanished, and then he was as bald as my palm."

Temple was sitting on the side of his wife's bed now. They could not see her expression. They could only see that she stiffened against the pillows behind her.

"Harry," she whispered, "you can't—you can't! Not to *me*!"

"I don't want to, Diana, but how can I help myself? With the jewelry I've got tucked away and my American investments, I can still live my life out in Mexico. And I've always told you I wouldn't be taken—and if, at the worst, I've got to be, I'd rather hang than rot in prison. But I fancy I can get away tonight, in Chappie's aeroplane from Heston. I'm really sorry, Diana, because I've loved you for ten years, and you've been a darned helpful wife, but I can't trust you when you're questioned tomorrow, and—"

"But they will get you, anyway," she whispered frantically. "Probably all the airports are watched. I told Falcon your name and that you killed Stella Bowman—"

As she said that name, Temple's expression, hitherto queerly normal and almost affectionate, hardened into such savage contempt that she screamed.

"You double-crossing vixen," he said very quietly, and as she screamed again, his bulk obliterated all but her fair, hysterical face and his hands dug deep into her throat.

As the watchers on the balcony burst into the room, Harry Temple, his gloved hands still savaging his wife's throat, gave a thick, sobbing gasp. His handsome face stared at them with a look of idiotic surprise, and then he leapt frantically toward the door.

Poss and Daisy had no difficulty in holding him while Gay Falcon, his eyes darting about the room, stood by the bed patting Mrs. Tem-

ple's clutching hand. Trying to smile up at him thankfully, her breath came in bruised, hysterical sobs.

Temple, held by the detectives, seemed to collapse.

"Henry Edward Hammersley," Poss began in his official voice, "or Henry Edward Temple, I am going to charge you with the attempted murder of your wife. There will be other charges. You will accompany me to Vine Street and—"

Harry Temple turned blindly toward the bed and, his blurred eyes accusing his wife, made some thick incoherent sounds even as a violent spasm made him sag helpless in the detectives' arms. Poss and Daisy got him to a chair. Poss reddened with temper.

"Daisy, ring a doctor quick. He's poisoned himself somehow."

Mrs. Temple, sobbing uncontrollably, suddenly clung tight to Gay Falcon's arm.

"I won't," Poss said savagely, "ever hear the end of this if he gets away with it—right under my nose. But how could I have stopped him?"

"You couldn't help it," Falcon said. "I'll back you up."

"Please, *please*," Diana Temple sobbed, "don't let him—die—in here! *Please*—I can't bear any more! He always said he'd poison himself if—"

Poss was busy searching the unconscious man's pockets.

Falcon pointed to a tiny rubber bulb and some remnants of smashed glass on the floor between the bed and the chair on which Temple lay.

"That's how he did it, Poss—a hypodermic. We crushed it under our feet as he dropped it. You don't have to tell me it smells of bitter almonds—they always do."

Poss, carefully putting the remnants of the hypodermic into a handkerchief, said soothingly:

"All right, Mrs. Temple, we'll do our best. Falcon, give me a hand while Daisy is telephoning and we'll get Temple out into the hall."

"I can't," said Gay Falcon, smiling tenderly at Mrs. Temple's lovely, distracted face. "This lady is in no state to be left alone even for a moment—and I guess she needs a doctor a deal more than Harry Temple does by now."

Poss looked at him with disgust, but just then Sergeant Daisy came back and between them they heaved Temple's inert bulk out of the room.

Falcon at once sat on the bed, and while she clung to him with

terror that would not be soothed he ran the fingers of one hand protectively through her soft hair.

"Thank God," she whispered, "you were here, Gay Falcon! Where would I be now but for you? Oh, I can't bear to think of—"

Poss re-entered the room and looked at them, particularly at Falcon, with severe disapproval.

"Mrs. Temple," he said sternly, "I regret to have to tell you that your husband has cheated the law. I shall have to take a brief statement from you now, while a full statement can be taken in the morning in the presence of your lawyer. Mr. Falcon, will you be so good as to leave the lady alone for just one minute so that she can give me her undivided attention?"

Still clinging to Falcon's arm, Diana Temple was obviously on the verge of an hysterical collapse.

"I simply can't talk now," she pleaded frantically. "Gay, please tell him—make him leave it all till—"

Poss said: "I sympathize, Mrs. Temple, but a couple of minutes will suffice. From what we overheard we can establish that the dead man was the brain behind the insurance thefts and also the murderer of Stella Bowman. Further, we were ourselves witnesses of as clear a case of attempted murder as—"

"Attempted?" said Gay Falcon, still caressing Mrs. Temple's hair. "Why attempted, Poss? Henry Edward Temple was very thoroughly murdered—right under our noses—by his loving wife."

As she tried to wrench herself away, he held her to him more tightly, in what was now a grotesque parody of affection. She said not a word, her breath coming in thick gasps, then suddenly she threw her head back and started screaming.

Falcon let her fall back onto the bed. She went on screaming, contorting her body frantically beneath the bedclothes. Daisy ran in, pop-eyed.

"Let her yell," Falcon said. "She's an expert on hysterics. Restrain your pity, Daisy—she had darn little for Stella Bowman when she strangled her."

Poss said: "But look here, we found the smashed hypodermic with which he—"

Falcon held out a pocket handkerchief, on which lay another small hypodermic, unbroken, half full.

"She had two—I was looking for this under the pillow while you and she thought I was flirting with her. It was almost undetectable murder, given the circumstances. A clear case of a thief and mur-

derer—so we were expected to think—poisoning himself to escape the law. But what actually happened was that as Temple made a grab at her, she chucked one hypodermic onto the floor, pretty certain it would be trodden underfoot, and then, just as we came in, jabbed him in the thigh with the other. You'll find her fingerprints on this."

Diana Temple, her lovely eyes dilated, lay staring at Gay Falcon. "You beast!" she whispered. "You sneaky, filthy Romeo! But you can't prove I killed Stella Bowman!"

Falcon regarded her absently. "You should watch your words, Mrs. Temple—they will be used against you."

Once outside in the hall, Poss said: "How did you get onto her?"

"Not till almost the last minute, Poss. Though I have been married to two pretty women and thought I was hard-boiled, she had me on a string all right. She had me just where she wanted me, believing that she was being victimized by Hammersley or Morgan, I wasn't quite certain which. It was always obvious that an insurance man was behind this racket.

"And then, at almost the very last minute, she made a mistake. Remember, she told Temple quite *unnecessarily* that she had told *me* who he was and that he had killed Stella Bowman. Then I knew that she was goading him into trying to kill her, and I wondered why. Remember, she did not accuse him of having killed Mrs. Bowman, all she said was that she had told me so—

"So that we, listening, could pin the charge on him, and also, when he made a grab at her, so that she could get a good chance of putting him away? All right, that can stick. You can kill in self-defense—but not with poison, and not when you *know* detectives are there to protect you. But why did she have to put Temple away?

"Because if he escaped, she would always be frightened of him and he might interfere with her life as the beautifully dressed and frantically fashionable Diana Temple—and being one of the best-dressed women in the world has been the money motive behind her crimes. Because, again, if he was arrested he would have given us proofs that she was not only the brains behind the insurance racket but also the killer of Stella Bowman.

"But I fancy she was right there—you will never convict her of that crime. Temple's death will be quite enough to go on with. An unpleasant character. But she *will* look swell in the box, all in black."

Lillian de la Torre

Goodbye, Miss Lizzie Borden

The Characters

MISS EMMA BORDEN

MAGGIE

NELLIE CUTTS

LITTLE GIRL

MISS LIZZIE BORDEN

TIME: August 4, 1893. Afternoon.

SCENE: *A sitting room in a house on Second Street, Fall River, Massachusetts. The room is sparsely furnished with black horsehair and walnut furniture. Prominent against the left wall is a sinister-looking black sofa, with a gloomy Bible print framed in black wood hanging above it. In the right wall is a single window, unscreened, open, with dark heavy drapes pulled back. In the back wall, center, is a large open fireplace of dark wood and brick. Right of the fireplace, the staircase comes down to a landing two steps high. The outside door opens onto the landing. Left is the kitchen door, open, but covered by closed portieres. Above the fireplace is a picture of Sutter's Fort garishly painted on a log. A round table in the center is covered with a fringed tapestry tablecloth and flanked by a straight chair placed primly on each side. On the table is a shoebox.*

As the curtain rises, MISS EMMA BORDEN comes furtively down the stairs. She is 43 years old, drab and characterless. One can see that her life has been one long story of being pushed around by other people. She wears dressy black and carries a small grip. She sets the grip down by the outside door, muttering to herself.

EMMA: Grip. Lunch. *(She locates it on the center table.)* Gloves. *(On the mantel)* Umbrella. *(By the door in the umbrella stand)* Ticket. *(She sets her purse on the center table and opens it to check this item. Just then she hears a noise on the stairs and whirls guiltily, hiding her purse behind her. It is MAGGIE, a*

positive, sturdy young Irishwoman, dressed for the street in shirt-waist and skirt.)

MAGGIE: (*Quietly but urgently*) Hurry up, Miss Emma, she's moving about up there, best be going in time.

EMMA: (*Moving toward the stairs, as if to listen*) Oh, dear. (*She begins picking up her things. MAGGIE fetches a bundle from where she has hidden it behind the portieres over the kitchen door. EMMA sees it.*) Why, Maggie—your bundle. Where are you going?

MAGGIE: I'm leaving.

EMMA: (*Wailing*) Oh, Maggie!

MAGGIE: I can't help it, I'm leaving. I can't stand it another minute.

EMMA: Oh, dear, they all leave. What are we to do?

MAGGIE: I'm sorry, Miss Emma, I've only stayed this long for your sake. I couldn't bear to leave you alone with—(*glancing up*) her.

EMMA: Thank you, Maggie.

MAGGIE: But now you'll be gone off to Fairhaven on your little vacation, and she'll have another servant in the kitchen, maybe, before you come back.

EMMA: Oh, dear, Maggie, how can she get another servant?

MAGGIE: (*Setting down her bag on the straight chair L.*) I can't stand it, Miss Emma. I never feel alone in this house. I'm cleaning about, thinking no evil, and then I get a shiver between me shoulderblades, and I turn around, and there *she* is, perfectly still—just looking at me—with that look she's had since the trial. It's more than a person can stand. I'm leaving.

EMMA: (*Touching her arm as she reaches for the bundle again*) I know. She's always spying. She knows every move we make.

MAGGIE: (*Leaving the bundle and crossing to the window*) And never a party nor a shindig, no callers, not a friend to drop in of an evening—it's like a house of death.

EMMA: (*Somberly, drawn toward the sofa*) It is a house of death. I can't stand it any more than you can. (*Turning to MAGGIE*) That's why I'm going down to Fairhaven. I can't stay cooped up with her any longer.

MAGGIE: Then you see what I mean.

EMMA: Oh, Maggie, why didn't you say something?

MAGGIE: I was afraid to say anything. I was afraid to tell her I wanted to leave. But when you decided to go away for a while—I can't stay alone with *her*, I'm leaving this minute. (*She takes her bag and turns to go, but at the foot of the stairs checks herself to listen.*)

EMMA: What is she doing?

MAGGIE: Just moving around.

EMMA: Better hurry. Goodbye, Maggie.

MAGGIE: Goodbye, Miss Emma. Don't miss your train.

EMMA: (*Looks at chatelaine watch*) I won't. I have a half hour yet.

And anyway, it isn't as if there wasn't another one soon after.

MAGGIE: Well, I know you, Miss Emma. Don't miss 'em both.

(*There is a sound from upstairs. Both women freeze for an instant, listening. Then MAGGIE goes quickly to the door. As she opens it, a woman comes up the step and confronts her. This is NELLIE CUTTS, a brisk, hearty creature of indeterminate age, dressed in mannish clothes, a severe black skirt, shirtwaist with stiff collar and tie, a straw boater on her pompadour.*)

NELLIE: Is Miss Lizzie Borden in?

MAGGIE: Miss Borden is out. (*She pushes her back and closes the door on both of them. MISS EMMA gets her umbrella from the stand and starts to check her traps again, talking to herself.*)

EMMA: Oh, dear, why can't they leave us in peace? Where's my gloves? What time is it? (*The bell peals violently.*) Maggie! Oh, she's gone. (*Bell again, very determined.*) Oh, dear, Lizzie will come down. (*Bell again, still more determined.*) Oh, dear, who is it, who is it? (*She opens the door. The same woman immediately puts her foot in the door.*)

NELLIE: Miss Borden?

EMMA: Oh, no, you can't come in, we don't see anybody.

NELLIE: Of course I'll come in. (*She pushes past EMMA, not rudely, but irresistibly, and stands surveying the room coolly.*) So this is the scene of the crime. Corpse found there—(*advancing to the sofa L.*) blood spattered all over the walls—had 'em redone, haven't you? Picked a nice jolly color, too, didn't you? This the picture that had forty-six blood spots on it? (*Picking at the frame*) They tell me there were eighty-seven spatters of blood in a space no larger than a palmleaf fan right here. (*During this harangue EMMA is irresolute. She goes to the stair-foot as if to call LIZZIE, loses her courage, comes back to the sitting room. NELLIE advances.*) You're Miss Lizzie Borden, I presume? (*EMMA shakes her head, but NELLIE goes on, unheeding.*) I must say you're not what I expected. Out West where I come from, when a woman's tough she's tough. Now, Miss Lizzie, I'm here to—

EMMA: (*Making herself heard*) I'm not Miss Lizzie, I'm Miss Emma.

NELLIE: Oh, the sister. That accounts for it. Well, Miss Emma, this

is the anniversary of the Second Street murders, isn't it? It's just a year since the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Borden by—

EMMA: (*Cutting in*) Since my father and my stepmother—died. We don't talk about it.

NELLIE: I missed your sister's trial. Some old girl, they tell me.

EMMA: She was acquitted. We don't talk about it.

NELLIE: Of course not. But the public is interested, you know. Now I'm from Sacramento, California, Miss Emma—greatest town on earth, pick up gold right in the streets. I represent the *Sacramento Record*, and I'm here to get some impressions for my paper—Second Street revisited, and all that.

EMMA: (*Recoiling down R.*) Oh, dear, you're one of those nasty reporters. Lizzie hates reporters. I know she won't listen to you for a moment.

NELLIE: (*Breaking L., looking around for inspiration*) Of course not, of course she won't. (*She finds it.*) Say, isn't that a picture of Sutter's Fort on the wall? (*Approaching it*)

EMMA: (*Approaching it also, with an affectionate smile*) Yes. Artistic, isn't it? Uncle Morse brought it back from the goldfields. It's all he brought back. He painted it himself.

NELLIE: Brought it back from the goldfields, did he? Now isn't that a coincidence? I'm from those goldfields myself. Morse, Morse—Say, is your Uncle Morse an old codger—sixtyish, maybe, with, uh—(*Fishing*)

EMMA: (*Eager*) A droopy moustache.

NELLIE: (*Pouncing on it*) That's it, a droopy moustache. And sort of—(*She describes with her hands a figure of indeterminate shape and size.*)

EMMA: Tall and thin? My goodness, do you know Uncle Morse?

NELLIE: I should say I do! Knew him well in Sacramento. Put her there, Miss Emma. Any niece of Old Man Morse is a friend of mine!

EMMA: (*Shaking hands*) How do you do, Miss—?

NELLIE: Nellie Cutts. Just call me Nellie. Now, as I was saying, Miss Emma, I represent the *Sacramento Record*, and I'm on a roving commission to report how things are in the East. And this Borden story's got everything! New England old maid—Sunday-school teacher and all that—up and kills half the family with an axe! Interview with Miss Lizzie Borden twelve months after! Great stuff! They'll eat it up in Sacramento!

EMMA: Oh, dear, I know Lizzie won't see you. (*Consulting her watch*) Really, Miss, I have to go now.

NELLIE: (*Blocking her way*) Now just a moment, Miss Emma, how about a word from you? (*Ready with pencil and flimsy copy-paper*) Here, I'll have to have something to lean on—this box'll do— (*Taking up the shoebox of lunch from the table*) How does it feel, Miss Emma, to live day in and day out within sight of the very bloodstains, as you might say? (EMMA's hand goes to her mouth in a characteristic gesture, pressing it as if to keep it from trembling. She is drawn to the couch L. and stares, haunted, at the wall above it.) How does it feel to take three meals a day with the woman who—was tried for the crime?

EMMA: (*To herself*) I've stood it as long as I can. That's why I'm going to Fairhaven. I can be alone in Fairhaven.

NELLIE: Of course, you must have found the last year very trying to the nerves. I suppose Miss Lizzie must be very difficult to live with?

EMMA: (*Looking upward*) Ssh. She's always listening and spying. She's down on you when you least expect it. (*Looks at watch*) Oh, dear, I mustn't miss the three thirty-seven.

NELLIE: (*Intercepts her as she moves toward door*) You won't miss it. (*They compare watches, during which a rattling of fenceposts is heard outside, and then a childish voice chanting.*)

LITTLE GIRL: (*Off*) Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks,
And when she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one.

(*Both women react immediately. MISS EMMA rushes out the door. NELLIE seizes her papers and box and rushes to the window, taking the chant down hastily. It is repeated and NELLIE scribbles furiously. The last line is broken off by a cry of pain from the child.*)

NELLIE: (*Reading*) Oh, this is a classic! "Lizzie Borden took an axe and gave her mother forty whacks—" (*Reenter EMMA. She holds the side of her face, as if in pain.*) "And when she saw what she had done she gave her father forty-one."

EMMA: (*With an anxious gaze upward*) Oh, do be quiet. Lizzie hears every word you say down here—her room is right up there.

NELLIE: (*Looking up*) Right up there, eh? But she wasn't up there when her father was being murdered, was she? (*Crossing to window and looking out*) She was out there in the barn eating pears—she says.

EMMA: Yes, she was. —Oh, I have to be going.

NELLIE: Now, Miss Emma, just sit down a minute, please.

EMMA: (*Protesting ineffectually*) But I have to be going—

NELLIE: Is it true that on the morning of the murders the breakfast consisted of bananas, cookies, and cold mutton soup?

EMMA: I don't know, I wasn't here. I was in Fairhaven.

NELLIE: (*Shaking her head*) Cold mutton soup! In August! No wonder somebody committed murder! Well, now, Miss Emma, your step-mother was found upstairs (*moves to the stairs and looks up*) with her head battered in with an axe?

EMMA: That's right.

NELLIE: (*Crossing to sofa L.*) And your father's body was on the sofa here, like this. (*She illustrates by stretching herself out on it, feet to ground.*)

EMMA: (*Crying out*) Don't!

NELLIE: (*Sitting up*) Miss Lizzie spread the alarm. The front door was triple-locked and Miss Lizzie was watching the side door—so *she* says. (*Crossing to window*) She was watching from the upper barn window, just standing there eating a pear and looking out—*she* says. How could anyone from outside have done it? How could they escape right under Miss Lizzie's eyes? If Miss Lizzie wasn't lying.

EMMA: (*Stiffly*) My sister was acquitted.

NELLIE: (*To herself, gazing out window*) Beats me how they acquitted her.

EMMA: Blood.

NELLIE: Hey?

EMMA: Blood. The air was full of blood. You said yourself there were bloodstains all over the wall. Whoever did it was covered with blood. (*She stops. Her hand goes to her mouth.*)

NELLIE: Well, what of it?

EMMA: The whole world saw Lizzie within ten minutes of the crime and she hadn't a spot of blood on her. What could they do but acquit her?

NELLIE: Tell me, Miss Emma, did *you* look carefully at Miss Lizzie to see if there was any blood on her? Her hair, perhaps? Or her shoes?

EMMA: Certainly not! My own sister! Besides, I didn't see Lizzie till I got back from Fairhaven that night. —Fairhaven! My train! (*Rising*) You'll have to excuse me now.

NELLIE: (*Seating her firmly with a hand on her shoulder*) Maybe she used an apron, one of those big coverall aprons.

EMMA: They never found one.

NELLIE: Easy enough to hide a thing like that in your own house. They never found the axe, either, did they?

EMMA: No, they never found the axe. I've often wondered where the axe got to.

NELLIE: But they searched the house?

EMMA: Oh, yes, they searched the house.

NELLIE: (*Scuffing at a place in the carpet*) Did they take up the carpet?

EMMA: Yes, they did.

NELLIE: (*Moving to the fireplace*) Did they search the chimney?

EMMA: Of course they did.

NELLIE: (*Exploring the fireplace*) Did they open the flue?

EMMA: Of course not—we couldn't have them tearing up the house.

NELLIE: I'd tear it up. Might be a sliding panel or something.

EMMA: Oh, Lizzie wouldn't have it. Everything's Lizzie's now. That is, of course it's half mine, but Lizzie takes care of everything for me.

NELLIE: (*Wiping sooty fingers*) Now, Miss Emma, you'll have to excuse me, but there's a question I have to ask. (*She seats herself L. of the table and prepares to take notes with papers and a shoebox she has left on the table.*) Is there any insanity in your family?

EMMA: (*Indignant*) Certainly not. That's the first thing they started asking. They asked ever so many questions about Uncle Morse—

NELLIE: He arrived for a visit, didn't he, just the day before the murders?

EMMA: Yes, he did. They were horrid about Uncle Morse. They kept asking people if he was quite right in his head. Just because he doesn't work steady anyplace and just sort of drifts around and visits people. Anybody pleasures himself in New England, folks say he's a mite tetched. It made me terribly angry. Uncle Morse is as sane as I am.

NELLIE: Where was Uncle Morse the morning of the murders?

EMMA: Visiting around. They had to admit it. He had a perfect alibi. It was just humiliating the way they snooped around after everybody. "Did Uncle Morse visit you on Thursday morning?" "Did you see Miss Emma Borden in Fairhaven?" Imagine asking about me all over Fairhaven! They got sent about their business, I guess! Of course I was right there in my room the whole time,

but Uncle Morse was moving around and that made it harder for him. They certainly asked a lot of questions about Uncle Morse before they decided to arrest Lizzie.

NELLIE: (*Leaning across the table, confidentially*) Miss Emma, tell me about the kitten.

EMMA: (*Hand to mouth*) Oh, dear.

NELLIE: They say the kitten was found dead down in the cellar. It had been killed with an axe.

EMMA: The kitten was the hardest. I cried for a week. It brought on my neuralgia. I like kittens. (*With a frightened look toward the stairs, then across the table to NELLIE, confidentially*) Lizzie never cried at all. It was Lizzie's kitten. Lizzie's a hard woman.

NELLIE: (*Rising*) Well, now, Miss Emma, let's get back to the fatal day. Mrs. Borden is lying in her blood upstairs. The servant is downstairs. She hears Mr. Borden at the front door trying to get in. She goes to let him in and finds the door is triple-locked. She lets him in, and upstairs on the landing she hears a horrible gloating laugh. The murderer is standing up there, Miss Emma, within sight of her first victim, and as she sees her second victim walk into her trap she laughs!

EMMA: It wasn't Lizzie. Lizzie was downstairs.

NELLIE: She changed her story, Miss Emma. First she said she was downstairs, then she said she was upstairs. She was certainly lying. Well, now—(*satisfied with the effect on EMMA*)—in comes Mr. Borden and lies down for a nap, right here on the sofa. The murderer covers herself with something (*she begins to act it out*) and creeps up on the old man with the axe (*taking the poker from the fireplace*) from behind, like this, and brings down the axe again and again—(*EMMA jumps to her feet, crying and covering her face with her hands, backing off R. NELLIE approaches her.*) Was it Miss Lizzie? Was it?

EMMA: No! It wasn't Lizzie! It wasn't!

(*MISS LIZZIE BORDEN sweeps aside the portieres. She is a stout, not unpleasant-looking woman, clothed in a drab cotton housedress. She is very composed and quiet.*)

LIZZIE: Emma. (*Thunderstruck pause. LIZZIE comes down a pace.*) You talk too much, Emma.

EMMA: Oh, Lizzie—this is different. This lady is a friend of Uncle Morse. (*NELLIE makes as if to acknowledge the introduction but LIZZIE crosses to EMMA without looking at her.*)

LIZZIE: Go upstairs, Emma. (EMMA *pauses as if to defy her.*) I said go upstairs, Emma.

EMMA: All right, Lizzie. (LIZZIE *turns to NELLIE, who has faked down L.*)

LIZZIE: Now, then, Miss, I'll take that poker. (NELLIE *hesitates stubbornly. As their glances lock, EMMA, pausing at the foot of the stairs, gets up her courage, snatches up her purse, and bolts out the door. LIZZIE, as the reporter yields the poker, hears the door close. She takes an angry step after her sister, then shrugs and replaces the poker.*) She won't get far.

NELLIE: I represent the *Sacramento Record*, Miss Borden.

LIZZIE: Friend of Uncle Morse, eh? What color hair has the old man got?

NELLIE: (*Choosing instantly*) Grey. (*At LIZZIE's look of triumph, she amends hastily.*) What there is of it.

LIZZIE: There's lots of it, and it's bright white. You never saw Uncle Morse in your life. Good day, Miss. (*Defeated, the reporter slowly crosses downstage, then pauses, gets up her courage, and comes back.*)

NELLIE: But, Miss Borden—my paper wants an interview.

LIZZIE: I don't give interviews.

NELLIE: Just one question, Miss Lizzie. The bloodstained apron—where did it get to?

LIZZIE: (*Edging her toward the door*) I have nothing to say.

NELLIE: And the bloody axe? Why wasn't the fireplace searched? (*At the door, one last try.*) If you'd just say a word for my paper—

LIZZIE: (*Final*) Good day, Miss! (*The door closes on NELLIE. Immediately the bell peals.*) Oh, no, you don't! (NELLIE's head comes in at the window.)

NELLIE: Your evening paper came, Miss Lizzie. (LIZZIE *whirls to face her. NELLIE grins at her surprise. She scales the paper into the room at LIZZIE's feet. LIZZIE glares at her and begins to stoop for the paper.*) Goodbye, Miss Lizzie.

(LIZZIE *straightens. The reporter waves and disappears. LIZZIE picks up the paper and absently sets it on the table. She stands thinking for a moment, looks toward the fireplace, frowns, shakes her head, looks toward the window, and then again toward the fireplace. Suddenly she seems to make a decision. She pulls the portieres over the window, then goes to the fireplace. With the poker, she forces open the secret panel, then thrusts in her arms to the elbow and begins groping for something. While she is*

absorbed in the task, the door opens and MISS EMMA comes in. She gets far enough into the room to see what LIZZIE is doing. At the same moment, LIZZIE drags out a bundle of cloth by one end. It unrolls and a small hand-axe or hatchet spills out on the hearth. LIZZIE turns to pick it up, and confronts her sister.)

EMMA: *(Dry throat)* I missed my train.

LIZZIE: *(Grimly)* Too bad.

EMMA: I stopped at the corner to get out my handkerchief and I heard the train tooting for the crossing. I missed it. *(Her voice dies away as she stares at the axe, taking it in slowly. Her hand goes to her face in the neuralgia gesture.)*

LIZZIE: Lock the door, Emma. *(EMMA locks the door and pockets the key. LIZZIE carries the axe and the apron to the table. EMMA comes down and stands by LIZZIE above the table. Both sisters stare at the mute evidence of guilt.)*

EMMA: Lizzie—your apron and the axe—they were in the chimney all the time.

LIZZIE: *(Backing off, staring at the things with loathing)* Yes, Emma.

EMMA: You hid them there after—

LIZZIE: Yes. I was afraid Maggie would come down any minute. I hid them in the chimney.

EMMA: I always wondered where they got to. I wondered how they could search and search and never find them.

LIZZIE: Father kept money behind that panel. He never knew I knew, and once he was dead nobody knew about it but me.

EMMA: Why did you do it?

LIZZIE: There's a way, isn't there, to tell who has been handling a weapon?

EMMA: I don't know—you've always been the clever one. *(She unrolls the blood-splashed apron and looks at it vaguely.)* I don't see any marks.

LIZZIE: *(Approaching her above the table and staring at the apron in her turn)* I don't, either, but they say the police can. A Frenchman wrote a book about it. Besides, *(confronting EMMA deliberately)* you had brought the axe from Fairhaven—it had the store mark etched on the head. *(EMMA has been staring at the blood on the apron, her hand to her mouth. Now she slowly raises her head and looks full at LIZZIE.)*

EMMA: Why, Lizzie, you knew all the time—

LIZZIE: I saw you. *(She crosses to the window and stares off.)* I saw you from the upper barn window. You came out the side door

and stood looking around. I saw your face. (*She shudders.*) That was all I needed. You ran to the street, and I came in and found Father. (*Turning toward the room*) It was my apron, and the blood on it—you needn't have used *my* apron, Emma.

EMMA: (*Reasonably*) It was the handiest, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: And you'd brought the axe from Fairhaven. I only had a minute. I hid them in Father's hideyhole. They were safe there until that (*angry*) newspaper snooper began to get ideas.

EMMA: (*Curiously*) Why did you hide them, Lizzie?

LIZZIE: What else could I do? I hated her, too, Emma.

EMMA: You don't remember Mother as I do. You couldn't have hated Mrs. Borden as I did.

LIZZIE: I didn't. But Father—Emma, why Father?

EMMA: After what he did to Mother, marrying that woman so soon after? You were always soft over Father, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: (*Sits R. of table, passing her hand over her face*) It's a relief, rather. Time after time, I've wanted to ask you about things—when they were examining and cross-examining me and keeping after me, I wanted so badly to know the truth so I would know what to say. But I never dared ask you—they had spies about me all the time. I made so many mistakes. When they asked if I had seen anybody leave the house, I was on guard not to mention you. I said, "No, nobody." "Then," says they, "there couldn't have been a stranger did it—so it must have been Miss Lizzie!" I ought to have said that I did see the murderer leaving, a big bearded man with a bloody axe. But I wasn't used to lying.

EMMA: I told the truth. I did hate Mrs. Borden worse than you did. But they wouldn't believe me, they thought I was lying to cover you.

LIZZIE: I had to lie about the laugh. I had to change my story and say I was up there laughing. Otherwise they would have started asking, Who *was* laughing? Whose laugh sounds like Lizzie's?

EMMA: There's only one answer—Emma's.

LIZZIE: I haven't laughed since.

EMMA: Neither have I.

LIZZIE: I haven't laughed since I found my kitten dead. I should have guessed, after the kitten. I ought to have been better on my guard.

EMMA: (*Coming down to her*) Having to kill the kitten was the hard-

est. It brought on my neuralgia. I cried for a week over the kitten.

LIZZIE: I know you did. How could I have supposed that you did it?

EMMA: That's why I cried, because I had to do it.

LIZZIE: (*Rising abruptly and coming down L.*) I was afraid at first they would find out you had been away from Fairhaven.

EMMA: I prayed for guidance, Lizzie. All the time I was at Fairhaven I stayed in my room and prayed for guidance.

LIZZIE: (*Turning on her testily*) What has that got to do with it?

EMMA: Don't you see? When the answer came to me, I just got the axe out of the shed and started for Fall River. They thought I was still in my room, I guess, praying for guidance. They didn't know I had had my answer.

LIZZIE: What a risk you ran!

EMMA: Oh, no, Lizzie, no risk at all. The Lord told me what to do, and he protected me. Nobody recognized me. The Lord protected me.

LIZZIE: (*Grimly*) I protected you.

EMMA: Why? Why did you hide the axe? Why did you let them arrest you? (*Cunningly*) You could have had all Father's money for yourself if they had found out about me. (*Retrospective*) I used to think about that sometimes, when the lawyers were telling the jury to find you guilty. I would think, maybe they'll take Lizzie and I'll have all the money for myself. Why did you protect me, Lizzie?

LIZZIE: I don't know. Because I've always protected you, I suppose. Because I enjoyed having the laugh on everybody, maybe.

EMMA: I never guessed. You had the laugh on me, didn't you, Lizzie?

LIZZIE: Didn't you know I knew?

EMMA: I had no idea. I thought the Lord had arranged it. Why didn't you tell me?

LIZZIE: With police spies all around?

EMMA: What would you have done, Lizzie, if they had found you guilty?

LIZZIE: (*Crossing to the window, reflectively*) I don't know. Gone through with it, I guess. I'd have gone through with it before I'd have given in to them.

EMMA: I guess you would. You were always a wicked, stubborn little piece.

LIZZIE: (*Facing out the window, as if facing the world*) I'd get sick of it—the jail, the reporters, the examining and re-examining—I'd

get sick of it, and tired to the bone, and I'd think, I've had enough, I'll tell them now. And then the prosecutor would come along with his pious face like a public statue, and the very thought of giving in and admitting I'd lied would make my gorge rise. And I'd say to myself, I'll face it down, they shan't break me. And (*over her shoulder, with grim triumph*) they didn't.

EMMA: No, they didn't.

LIZZIE: And besides, it would have been giving in for nothing—they wouldn't have believed me.

EMMA: I suppose they wouldn't.

LIZZIE: (*Facing her coolly*) I used to wonder, Emma—if they had found me guilty, what would *you* have done?

EMMA: I used to wonder, too. But I'd have had guidance when the time came. I didn't let it worry me.

LIZZIE: (*Nettled*) Oh, you didn't let it worry you! You let me go through it—sit out there in court day after day, pilloried, the crowd hating me—

EMMA: I know, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: (*Approaching her angrily*) How do you know? (*Moving down L., remembering*) How do you know what I went through? The crowds staring at you, thinking you did it. The women who hiss at you at the courtroom door—they hate you—they want to see you dead. What do you know about it?

EMMA: (*Following her, intensely*) What do you know about it, Lizzie? You had the easy part. You didn't have to do it. I thought it would be like chopping wood. It isn't. (*She fingers the back of the L. chair.*) Wood splits. Flesh— (*She fixes her eyes on LIZZIE's arm, and reaches to touch it. LIZZIE shrinks.*) Flesh strikes back. It stops you. You feel the resistance all the way up to your elbow. And wood doesn't bleed. Blood— (*She crosses L. to stand in front of the sofa and stare at the wall where the bloodstains were.*) Blood doesn't flow, Lizzie. It flies. It jumps at you. The air is red with it. (*Her hand goes to her face in the neuralgia gesture.*)

LIZZIE: (*Crossing down R. in revulsion*) I know. I saw the walls.

EMMA: You don't know. You don't know anything. You didn't have to do it. (*She lifts her head suddenly.*) Listen! (*LIZZIE, following her gaze, goes toward the stair and listens. She hears nothing, and turns to EMMA in apprehension.*) Listen! There she is—Mrs. Borden—going up the stairs. I'll have to hurry—I'll need the axe—

LIZZIE: (*Appalled*) I've known it, I've watched you night and day for

a year, knowing this would come. (EMMA gets the axe and starts for the stairs. LIZZIE blocks her above the table. Firmly, as to a child.) Mrs. Borden's gone, Emma, she's been gone for a year.

EMMA: She's upstairs—don't stop me. (She rounds the table L. and starts to cross downstage.)

LIZZIE: (Blocking her down R.) Put down the axe, Emma, and come with me.

EMMA: (Suspiciously) Now? Where?

LIZZIE: Just across the street to see Dr. Bowen.

EMMA: So you can put me away. So you can shut me up. I'll not be shut up, Lizzie. It wasn't meant I should be shut up.

LIZZIE: (Patiently) Just come and see Dr. Bowen.

EMMA: (Backing away) He'll put me away. I'll not have it, Lizzie! I'll die first! (She looks at the axe.) But I don't have to die, do I? Nobody knows but you. No, I'm not the one to die. (She has reached the kitchen door, up L. Suddenly, she turns and locks it.)

LIZZIE: (Testily, without fear) What nonsense is this, Emma? (EMMA doesn't answer. She comes down to the table and starts tying on the apron, disturbed.) Emma! What are you doing?

EMMA: (Quietly) I'm putting on my apron. I just explained to you, Lizzie. Blood spatters. You don't want me to spoil my best dress, do you? (She picks up the axe again.)

LIZZIE: (Going to her, firmly and earnestly) Emma, listen to me. You have to go to Fairhaven. You'll miss your train, Emma.

EMMA: (Still in an expressionless voice, reasonably) It won't take long. It's over in a minute, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: (Beginning to be alarmed, retreats L. around table and puts the L. chair between them) Emma, think what you're doing! You can't escape twice!

EMMA: (Following her) Oh, yes, I can. I do what I have to do, and the rest takes care of itself. I don't want to, Lizzie, you must understand that.

LIZZIE: (Giving ground) Then wait, Emma, wait—be sure it's what you have to do.

EMMA: Oh, it is. I knew as soon as I saw the axe. What else did you keep it for? I knew there was to be another just as soon as I saw the axe.

LIZZIE: I kept it to protect you, Emma. Think, Emma!

EMMA: (Crying out in anguish) Oh, Lizzie, don't talk—it only makes it harder! (She lifts the axe. LIZZIE, at bay against the murder

couch, braces herself. The front doorbell peals sharply. EMMA turns her head for an instant, and LIZZIE wrenches the axe from her hand. NELLIE sticks her head between the portieres over the window. LIZZIE, hiding the axe behind her, steps forward quickly to cover EMMA.)

NELLIE: Say, Miss Lizzie, can't you change your mind and give me a statement now that Miss Emma's gone? (*LIZZIE's involuntary glance points to EMMA, standing motionless, her back turned.*) Oh, there you are, Miss Emma—you missed your train after all, did you?

LIZZIE: (*Her authority restored*) Take that thing off, Emma, and open the front door.

NELLIE: (*Waving her hand cheerfully*) Good for you, Miss Lizzie. (*She withdraws her head. EMMA takes off the apron and stuffs it behind a sofa-cushion. LIZZIE fakes upstage L., watching her. EMMA crosses up slowly. She pauses as if to assert herself, but LIZZIE makes a threatening step toward her and she crosses and unlocks the door up R. As EMMA turns the key, LIZZIE realizes that she is still holding the axe concealed in a fold of her skirt. She has barely time to conceal it in the folded newspaper on the table when NELLIE barges in. EMMA drifts down R. by window.*) Now this is real nice of you, Miss Lizzie. (*LIZZIE draws a handkerchief from her sleeve and wipes her brow and the palms of her hands.*) Hot day—hope we have rain. What's the forecast? What's the paper say? (*Reaching for it*)

LIZZIE: (*Quickly*) Fair and warmer. (*Her finger, pointing to the forecast, holds the paper firmly down.*)

NELLIE: (*Reading*) Fair and cooler. (*She gives LIZZIE a quick look.*)

LIZZIE: Now, then, young woman, be quick.

NELLIE: I'll take only a few minutes of your time. (*She takes out pencil and copy-paper.*) Tell me, Miss Lizzie—I've been thinking about the murder weapon. It was never found. What's your opinion? Where did it get to?

LIZZIE: I think the murderer carried it away with him. (*NELLIE tries to note this reply but the paper is too flimsy.*)

NELLIE: I'll have to have something to lean on. Where's that box?—Here, the newspaper will do. (*She reaches for it. LIZZIE sits down quickly in the L. chair, leaning her elbow on the paper and her chin on her hand.*)

LIZZIE: Emma, get your friend a book. (*EMMA fetches a book from the mantel, LIZZIE talking fast the while.*) An axe isn't an easy thing

to hide, is it? Such an odd shape—and heavy, too. Of course, you could burn the handle, but what would you do with the head?

NELLIE: (*Accepting the book from EMMA and making a note*) I never thought of that. (*EMMA drifts back down R.*)

LIZZIE: All in all, I'm convinced that the murderer carried off his weapon with him. Well, thank you very much.

NELLIE: Say, Miss Lizzie, I'm not nearly through.

LIZZIE: (*Rising*) I have nothing more to say. (*Crossing down R. and speaking directly to EMMA*) Miss Emma is leaving now. You can walk with her to the station.

NELLIE: Well—(*Putting up her paper and pencil*) Say, isn't this the *Providence Journal*? I'll just take a look at it. (*She has picked it up from the table and LIZZIE, her attention fixed on EMMA, is too far away to stop her. The axe falls with a clatter in front of the table. EMMA's eyes fix. She circles L. of table, her eyes on the axe, and bends slowly to pick it up.*)

LIZZIE: (*Sharply*) Emma! Don't miss your train!

EMMA: (*Confused, hand to mouth*) Oh, dear, I mustn't miss my train.

LIZZIE: (*Pushing her firmly toward the door*) Here's your purse. And your grip. (*EMMA accepts the things and opens the door. On the threshold, she stops and turns back. She stands on the landing and takes in the room slowly, item by item. Then she looks directly at LIZZIE, standing L. of the step.*)

EMMA: I'll send for my things, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Very well, Emma.

EMMA: Goodbye, Lizzie. (*She goes. The door closes. LIZZIE stands motionless, back to audience.*)

LIZZIE: Goodbye, Emma.

NELLIE: Send for her things—isn't she coming back?

LIZZIE: (*Over her shoulder*) What did you say?

NELLIE: Isn't she coming back?

LIZZIE: (*Looking after EMMA*) No. She isn't coming back.

NELLIE: (*Looking at the axe on the floor*) Whole thing torn wide open, eh? Say, Miss Lizzie, now will you give me a statement?

LIZZIE: Certainly not.

NELLIE: Miss Emma thinks now you killed them, doesn't she? Did you, Miss Lizzie? Did you kill them?

LIZZIE: (*Wearily, no expression*) No, I didn't kill them.

NELLIE: (*Crowding her*) Come on, Miss Lizzie, give me the straight tip. You've been acquitted, you can't be tried again. Go ahead, spill it.

LIZZIE: (*Coming down R.*) I didn't do it.

NELLIE: Then who did it? It was somebody in this house. There's the murder weapon. If you didn't do it, who did? Maggie? Miss Emma? (*LIZZIE stiffens, but says nothing. NELLIE snaps her fingers.*) Miss Emma! That's it! I see it all! What a sensation! They can't try Miss Lizzie Borden again—but they can try Miss Emma! And I'll be in the thick of it! I see the headlines! Emma Borden unmasked! Reporter bares murder weapon! Emma's marks on deadly axe! Slayer of two condemned to die! Lizzie's martyrdom in vain! It's the sensation of the century! Miss Emma Borden! Why didn't I see it before!

LIZZIE: Stop talking such rubbish, young woman, and get out that pencil of yours. I'll make a statement. I did it.

NELLIE: (*Delighted, descending on LIZZIE*) You killed them? You killed them both? With the axe?

LIZZIE: (*Crossing away from her down L.*) I killed them. I killed them both. With the axe.

NELLIE: Why? Why did you kill them?

LIZZIE: (*Turning on her, sick of the whole thing—ferociously*) I don't like cold mutton soup!

NELLIE: (*Walking R., taking it down*) Chiggers, what a scoop!

LIZZIE: (*Coolly*) 'Tisn't such a scoop.

NELLIE: It isn't? Why not?

LIZZIE: 'Tisn't a scoop if you can't print it (*striding to her*) and I'll sue you if you print it. I've been acquitted in open court—I'm innocent, and don't you forget it. You print a word of this, and you'll hear from me. I've got a quarter of a million dollars, my girl, and I'll spend every cent of it, if I have to, to defend my good name.

NELLIE: (*Jaw to jaw, contemptuously*) Good name! Everybody in Fall River knows you did it. You just admitted it yourself.

LIZZIE: Never mind what they know. Never you mind what I just admitted. Just *you* keep your tongue between your teeth. You're not going to print that story, so you can just tear up those notes of yours. (*She turns away. Her foot touches the axe on the floor and she automatically picks it up.*)

NELLIE: (*Defiantly*) I certainly will not tear it up. I have a duty to my paper—

LIZZIE: (*Turning on her, axe in hand, authoritatively*) I said tear it up. (*LIZZIE is used to being obeyed, but this time the results rather*

surprise her. NELLIE catches sight of the axe and begins to back toward the door, tearing the notes.)

NELLIE: Of course, Miss Lizzie, glad to oblige you. Thank you, Miss Lizzie. I'm just going, Miss Lizzie. *(She reaches the door, pauses a moment on the step, and looks at LIZZIE with horror.)* No wonder Miss Emma isn't coming back! Goodbye, Miss Lizzie Borden! *(LIZZIE is left by the table with the axe in her hand. She lifts it, looks at it with loathing, and is about to set it down when from outside comes the rattle of palings and the same childish voice is heard chanting.)*

LITTLE GIRL *(Off)* Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks,
And when she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one.

(LIZZIE's grip on the axe tightens in anger as she listens, and she draws the axe elbow high. When the quatrain is finished, she lets the axe fall in a gesture of hopelessness, letting it strike without force the wood of the table. She works it loose, and again lets it fall. Suddenly she brings the axe around in a full circle and crashes it savagely into the table as the curtain falls.)



The Turn of the Tide

"What always beats them in the end," said Dr. Matthews, "is how to dispose of the body. But, of course, you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," said Slade. He had, in fact, been devoting far more thought to what Dr. Matthews believed to be the accidental subject of conversation than Dr. Matthews could ever guess.

"As a matter of fact," went on Dr. Matthews, warming to the subject to which Slade had so tactfully led him, "it's a terribly knotty problem. It's so difficult, in fact, that I always wonder why anyone is fool enough to commit murder."

All very well for you, thought Slade, but he did not allow his thoughts to alter his expression. You smug, self-satisfied old ass! You don't know the sort of difficulties a man can be up against.

"I've often thought the same," he said.

"Yes," went on Dr. Matthews, "it's the body that does it every time. To use poison calls for special facilities, which are good enough to hang you as soon as suspicion is roused. And that suspicion—well, of course, part of my job is to detect poisoning. I don't think anyone can get away with it nowadays, even with the most dunderheaded general practitioner."

"I quite agree with you," said Slade. He had no intention of using poison.

"Well," went on Dr. Matthews, developing his logical argument, "if you rule out poison, you rule out the chance of getting the body disposed of under the impression that the victim died a natural death. The only other way, if a man cares to stand the racket of having the body to give evidence against him, is to fake things to look like suicide. But you know and I know that it just can't be done. The mere fact of suicide calls for a close examination, and no one has ever been able to fix things so well as to get away with it. You're a lawyer. You've probably read a lot of reports of trials where the murderer has tried it. And you know what's happened to them."

"Yes," said Slade.

He certainly had given a great deal of consideration to the matter. It was only after long thought that he had, finally, put aside the

notion of disposing of young Spalding and concealing his guilt by a sham suicide.

"That brings us to where we started, then," said Dr. Matthews. "The only other thing left is to try and conceal the body. And that's more difficult still."

"Yes," said Slade. But he had a perfect plan for disposing of the body.

"A human body," said Dr. Matthews, "is a most difficult thing to get rid of. That chap Oscar Wilde, in that book of his—*Dorian Gray*, isn't it?—gets rid of one by the use of chemicals. Well, I'm a chemist as well as a doctor and I wouldn't like the job."

"No?" said Slade politely.

Dr. Matthews was not nearly as clever a man as himself, he thought.

"There's altogether too much of it," said Dr. Matthews. "It's heavy, and it's bulky, and it's bound to undergo corruption. Think of all those poor devils who've tried it. Bodies in trunks, and bodies in coal-cellar, and bodies in chicken-runs. You can't hide the thing, try as you will."

Can't I? That's all you know, thought Slade, but aloud he said: "You're quite right. I've never thought about it before."

"Of course you haven't," agreed Dr. Matthews. "Sensible people don't, unless it's an incident of their profession, as in my case."

"And yet, you know," he went on meditatively, "there's one decided advantage about getting rid of the body altogether. You're much safer, then. It's a point which ought to interest you as a lawyer more than me. It's rather an obscure point of law, but I fancy there are very definite rulings on it. You know what I'm referring to?"

"No, I don't," said Slade, genuinely puzzled.

"You can't have a trial for murder unless you can prove there's a victim," said Dr. Matthews. "There's got to be a *corpus delicti*, as you lawyers say in your horrible dog-Latin. A corpse, in other words, even if it's only a bit of one, like that which hanged Crippen. No corpse, no trial. I think that's good law, isn't it?"

"By Jove, you're right!" said Slade. "I wonder why that hadn't occurred to me before?"

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he regretted having said them. He did his best to make his face immobile again—he was afraid his expression might have hinted at his pleas-

ure in discovering another very reassuring factor in this problem of killing young Spalding. But Dr. Matthews had noticed nothing:

"Well, as I said, people only think about these things if they're incidental to their profession," he said. "And, all the same, it's only a theoretical piece of law. The entire destruction of a body is practically impossible. But I suppose if a man could achieve it, he would be all right. However strong the suspicion was against him, the police couldn't get him without a corpse. There might be a story in that, Slade, if you or I were writers."

"Yes," assented Slade, and laughed harshly. There never would be any story about the killing of young Spalding, the insolent pup.

"Well," said Dr. Matthews, "we've had a pretty gruesome conversation, haven't we? And I seem to have done all the talking, somehow. That's the result, I suppose, Slade, of the very excellent dinner you gave me. I'd better push off now. Not that the weather is very inviting."

Nor was it. As Slade saw Dr. Matthews into his car, the rain was driving down in a real winter storm and there was a bitter wind blowing. "Shouldn't be surprised if this turned to snow before morning," were Dr. Matthews' last words before he drove off.

Slade was glad it was such a tempestuous night. It meant that, more certainly than ever, there would be no one out in the lanes, and no one out on the sands when he disposed of young Spalding's body.

Back in his drawing room, Slade looked at the clock. There was still an hour to spare—he could spend it in making sure that his plans were all correct.

He looked up the tide tables. Yes, that was right enough. Spring tides. The lowest of low water on the sands. There wasn't so much luck about that. Young Spalding came back on the midnight train every Wednesday night, and it wasn't surprising that sooner or later the Wednesday night would coincide with a spring tide. But it was lucky that this particular Wednesday night should be one of tempest—luckier still that low water should be at one-thirty, the best time for him.

He opened the drawing-room door and listened carefully. He couldn't hear a sound. Mrs. Dumbleton, his housekeeper, must have been in bed some time now. She was as deaf as a post, anyway, and wouldn't hear his departure. Nor his return, when Spalding had been killed and disposed of.

The hands of the clock seemed to be moving very fast. He must

make sure everything was correct. The plough chain and the other iron weights were already in the back seat of the car; he had put them there before old Matthews arrived to dine. He slipped on his overcoat.

From his desk, Slade took a curious little bit of apparatus: eighteen inches of strong cord, tied at each end to a six-inch length of wood so as to make a ring. He made a last close examination to see that the knots were quite firm, and then he put it in his pocket. As he did so, he ran through in his mind the words—he knew them by heart—of the passage in the book about the Thugs of India, describing the method of strangulation employed by them.

He could think quite coldly about all this. Young Spalding was a pestilent busybody. A word from him, now, could bring ruin upon Slade, could send him to prison, could have him struck off the rolls.

Slade thought of other defaulting solicitors he had heard of, even one or two with whom he had come into contact professionally. He remembered his brother solicitors' remarks about them, pitying or contemptuous. He thought of having to beg his bread in the streets on his release from prison, of cold and misery and starvation. The shudder which shook him was succeeded by a hot wave of resentment. Never, never would he endure it.

What right had young Spalding, who had barely been qualified two years, to condemn a grey-haired man twenty years his senior to such a fate? If nothing but death would stop him, then he deserved to die. He clenched his hand on the cord in his pocket.

A glance at the clock told him he had better be moving. He turned out the lights and tiptoed out of the house, shutting the door quietly. The bitter wind flung icy rain into his face, but he did not notice it.

He pushed the car out of the garage by hand and, contrary to his wont, locked the garage doors, as a precaution against the infinitesimal chance that on a night like this someone should notice that his car was out.

He drove cautiously down the road. Of course, there wasn't a soul about in a quiet place like this. The few street-lamps were already extinguished.

There were lights in the station as he drove over the bridge; they were awaiting there the arrival of the twelve-thirty train. Spalding would be on that. Every Wednesday he went over to his subsidiary office, sixty miles away. Slade turned into the lane a quarter of a mile beyond the station and then reversed his car so that it pointed

toward the road. He put out the sidelights and settled himself to wait. His hand fumbled with the cord in his pocket.

The train was a little late. Slade had been waiting a quarter of an hour when he saw the lights of the train emerge from the cutting and come to a standstill in the station. So wild was the night that he could hear nothing of it. Then the train moved slowly out again. As soon as it was gone, the lights in the station began to go out, one by one. Hobson, the porter, was making ready to go home, his turn of duty completed.

Next, Slade's straining ears heard footsteps.

Young Spalding was striding down the road. With his head bent before the storm, he didn't notice the dark mass of the motor-car in the lane and he walked past it.

Slade counted up to two hundred slowly, and then he switched on his lights, started the engine, and drove the car out into the road in pursuit. He saw Spalding in the light of the headlamps and drew up alongside.

"Is that Spalding?" he said, striving to make the tone of his voice as natural as possible. "I'd better give you a lift, old man, hadn't I?"

"Thanks very much," said Spalding. "This isn't the sort of night to walk two miles in." He climbed in and shut the door.

No one had seen. No one would know. Slade let in his clutch and drove slowly down the road.

"Bit of luck, seeing you," he said. "I was just on my way home from bridge at Mrs. Clay's when I saw the train come in and remembered it was Wednesday and you'd be walking home. So I thought I'd turn a bit out of my way to take you along."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," said Spalding.

"As a matter of fact," said Slade, speaking slowly and driving slowly, "it wasn't altogether disinterested. I wanted to talk business to you, as it happened."

"Rather an odd time to talk business," said Spalding. "Can't it wait till tomorrow?"

"No, it cannot," said Slade. "It's about the Lady Vere trust."

"Oh, yes, I wrote to remind you last week that you had to make delivery."

"Yes, you did. And I told you, long before that, that it would be inconvenient, with Hammond abroad."

"I don't see that," said Spalding. "I don't see that Hammond's got

anything to do with it. Why can't you just hand over and have done with it? I can't do anything to straighten things up until you do."

"As I said, it would be inconvenient." Slade brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road. "Look here, Spalding," he said desperately, "I've never asked a favor of you before. But now I ask you, as a favor, to forego delivery for a bit. Just for three months, Spalding."

But Slade had small hope that his request would be granted. So little hope, in fact, that he brought his left hand out of his pocket holding the piece of wood with the loop of cord dangling from its ends. He put his arm around the back of Spalding's seat.

"No, I can't, really I can't," said Spalding. "I've got my duty to my clients to consider. I'm sorry to insist, but you're quite well aware of what my duty is."

"Yes," said Slade. "But I beg you to wait. I implore you to wait, Spalding. There! Perhaps you can guess why now."

"I see," said Spalding after a long pause.

"I only want three months," pressed Slade. "Just three months. I can get straight again in three months."

Spalding had known of other men who had had the same belief in their ability to get straight in three months. It was unfortunate for Slade—and for Spalding—that Slade had used those words. Spalding hardened his heart. "No," he said. "I can't promise anything like that. I don't think it's any use continuing this discussion. Perhaps I'd better walk home from here."

He put out his hand to the latch of the door, and as he did so Slade jerked the loop of cord over his head. A single turn of Slade's wrist—a thin, bony, old man's wrist, but as strong as steel in that wild moment—tightened the cord about Spalding's throat. Slade swung round in his seat, getting both hands to the piece of wood, twisting madly. His breath hissed between his teeth with the effort, but Spalding never drew breath at all. He lost consciousness long before he was dead. Only Slade's grip of the cord round his throat prevented the dead body from falling forward, doubled up.

Nobody had seen, nobody would know. And what that book had stated about the method of assassination practised by Thugs was perfectly correct.

Slade had gained, now, the time in which he could get his affairs into order. With all the promise of his current speculations, with all his financial ability, he would be able to recoup himself for his past

losses. It only remained to dispose of Spalding's body, and he had planned to do that very satisfactorily. Just for a moment, Slade felt as if all this were only some heated dream, some nightmare, but then he came back to reality and went on with the plan he had in mind.

He pulled the dead man's knees forward so that the corpse lay back in the seat, against the side of the car. He put the car in gear, let in his clutch, and drove rapidly down the road—much faster than when he had been arguing with Spalding. Low water was in three-quarters of an hour's time and the sands were ten miles away.

Slade drove fast through the wild night. There wasn't a soul about in those lonely lanes. He knew the way by heart—he had driven repeatedly over that route recently in order to memorize it.

The car bumped down the last bit of lane and Slade drew up on the edge of the sands.

It was pitch dark, and the bitter wind was howling about him under the black sky. Despite the noise of the wind, he could hear the surf breaking far away, two miles away, across the level sands. He climbed out of the driver's seat and walked round to the other door. When he opened it, the dead man fell sideways into his arms.

With an effort, Slade held him up, while he groped into the back of the car for the plough chain and the iron weights. He crammed the weights into the dead man's pockets and wound the chain round and round the dead man's body, tucking in the ends to make it all secure. With that mass of iron to hold it down, the body would never be found again when dropped into the sea at the lowest ebb of spring tide.

Slade tried now to lift the body in his arms, to carry it over the sands. He reeled and strained, but he was not strong enough—Slade was a man of slight figure and past his prime. The sweat on his forehead was icy in the icy wind.

For a second, doubt overwhelmed him, lest all his plans should fail for want of bodily strength. But he forced himself into thinking clearly, he forced his frail body into obeying the vehement commands of his brain.

He turned round, still holding the dead man upright. Stooping, he got the heavy burden on his shoulders. He drew the arms round his neck and, with a convulsive effort, got the legs up round his hips. The dead man now rode him pick-a-back. Bending nearly double, Slade was able to carry the heavy weight in that fashion, the arms tight round his neck, the legs tight round his waist.

He set off, staggering, down the imperceptible slope of the sands toward the sound of the surf. The sands were soft beneath his feet—it was because of this softness that he had not driven the car down to the water's edge. He could afford to take no chances of being embogged.

The icy wind shrieked round him all that long way. The tide was nearly two miles out. That was why Slade had chosen this place. In the depth of winter, no one would go out to the water's edge at low tide for months to come.

He staggered on over the sands, clasping the limbs of the body close about him. Desperately, he forced himself forward, not stopping to rest, for he only just had time now to reach the water's edge before the flow began. He went on and on, driving his exhausted body with fierce urgings from his frightened brain.

Then, at last, he saw it: a line of white in the darkness which indicated the water's edge. Farther out, the waves were breaking in an inferno of noise. Here, the fragments of the rollers were only just sufficient to move the surface a little.

He was going to make quite sure of things. Steadying himself, he stepped into the water, wading in farther and farther so as to be able to drop the body into comparatively deep water. He held to his resolve, staggering through the icy water, knee deep, thigh deep, until it was nearly at his waist. This was far enough. He stopped, gasping in the darkness.

He leaned over to one side to roll the body off his back. It did not move. He pulled at its arms. They were obstinate. He couldn't loosen them. He shook himself wildly. He tore at the legs round his waist. Still the thing clung to him. Wild with panic and fear, he flung himself about in a mad effort to rid himself of the burden. It clung on as though it were alive. He could not break its grip.

Then another breaker came in. It splashed about him, wetting him far above his waist. The tide had begun to turn now, and the tide on those sands comes in like a racehorse.

He made another effort to cast off the load, and when it still held him fast he lost his nerve and tried to struggle out of the sea. But it was too much for his exhausted body. The weight of the corpse and of the iron with which it was loaded overbore him. He fell.

He struggled up again in the foam-streaked, dark sea, staggered a few steps, fell again—and did not rise. The dead man's arms were round his neck, throttling him, strangling him. Rigor mortis had set in and Spalding's muscles had refused to relax.

Stanley Ellin

The Best of Everything

In Arthur's eyes, they were all seemingly cut from one pattern. They were uniformly tall and well built. They had regular features set into nicely tanned faces and capped by crewcuts. Their clothing was expensively staid; their manners were impeccable. They came from impressive Families and impressive Schools, and they regarded these things casually. Among the bees that swarmed through the midtown hive, through Gothic piles redolent with the pleasant scent of gilt-edged securities, through glass pinnacles like futuristic fish bowls, they were not the most obtrusive, yet they were not lost.

To their jobs they brought the qualifications of Family and School and the capacity for looking politely eager when a superior addressed them. Actually, they were as casual about their jobs as they were about everything else, because they were cushioned with money. And for all this Arthur hated them, and would have sold his soul to be one of them.

Physically, he might have passed muster. He was a tall, extremely good-looking young man—when he walked by, few women could resist giving him that quick little sidelong glance which means they are interested, even if unavailable—and he had a sober poise which was largely the product of shrewd observation and good self-control. But he came from no impressive Family, no impressive School—and he had no money outside of his moderate salary. His parents were dead (their legacy had barely paid their funeral expenses), he had left high school before graduation to go to work, and uneasily shifted jobs until he had recently come to port in Horton & Son, and he could, at any moment he was asked, have stated his net worth to the penny: the total of bank account, wallet, and change pocket. Obviously, he could not afford to be casual, as a fine young man should.

That phrase, "fine young man," crystallized his hatred of the type. He had been standing outside Mr. Horton's door one morning when the two sons of a client had been ushered out. Their eyes flicked over Arthur in the fraction of a second, instantly marked that he was not one of them, and turned blankly indifferent. Nothing was

said, nothing done, but he was put neatly in his place in that moment and left to stand there with the hate and anger boiling in him. And he couldn't hit back, that was the worst of it; there was no way of touching them. Their homes, their clubs, their lives were inaccessible.

When the elevator door closed behind them, Mr. Horton seemed to notice Arthur for the first time. "Fine young men," he observed, almost wistfully, gesturing toward the elevator door, and the phrase had been planted. Not only planted, but fertilized on the spot by Mr. Horton's tone, which, to Arthur's inflamed mind, appeared to add: *They belong to my world, but you do not.*

And to make it worse, of course, there was Ann. Ann Horton.

It is the traditional right of every enterprising young man to apply himself as diligently to romance as to business, and to combine the highest degree of success in both by marrying the boss's daughter. And if the daughter happened to be as beautiful and desirable and, to use the admiring expression of those who knew her, unspoiled as Ann Horton, so much the better.

But what Arthur knew instinctively was that there are different degrees of being unspoiled. Thus, if a girl who desperately yearns for a forty-foot cabin cruiser and finally settles for a twenty-foot speedboat is unspoiled, Ann Horton was unspoiled. It is not quite sufficient to approach someone like this bringing only a burning passion and an eagerness to slay dragons. It is also necessary to come riding in golden armor, mounted on a blooded horse, and bearing orchestra seats to the best musical comedy in town. And, if the suitor is to make his point explicit, not on rare occasions, but frequently.

All this and more Arthur brooded over as he lay on his bed in Mrs. Marsh's rooming house night after night, and studied the ceiling. His thoughts were maddening, whirling around on themselves like the apocryphal snake seizing its own tail and then devouring itself. Ann Horton had looked at him more than once the way all women looked at him. If he could only meet her, offer her the image of himself that she required, was marriage out of the question? But to meet her on her terms took money, and, ironically, the only chance he ever had of getting money was to marry her! Good Lord, he thought, if he ever could do that he'd have enough money to throw into the face of every fine young man he'd ever hated.

So the thoughts slowly reshaped themselves, and without his quite knowing it Ann Horton became the means, not the end. The end

would be the glory that comes to those who, without counting their money, can afford the best of everything. *The best of everything*, Arthur would say dreamily to himself, and his eyes would see beautiful, expensive pictures like clouds moving across the ceiling.

Charlie Prince was a young man who obviously had known the best of everything. He made his entrance into Arthur's life one lunch hour as Arthur sat finishing his coffee, his eyes on a Horton & Son prospectus spread on the table before him, his thoughts on a twenty-foot speedboat with Ann Horton.

"Hope you don't mind my asking," said Charlie Prince, "but do you work for old Horton?"

The voice was the voice of someone from a Family and a School; even the use of the word "old" was a natural part of it, since the word was now in vogue among *them*, and could be applied to anything, no matter what its age might be.

Arthur looked up from shoes, to suit, to shirt, to necktie, to hat, his mind mechanically tabbing them *Oliver Moore, Brooks, Sulka, Bronzini, Cavanaugh*, and then stopped short at the face. True, it was tanned, marked by regular features, and capped by the inevitable crew haircut, but there was something else about it. Some small lines about the eyes, some twist of the lips.

"That's right," Arthur said warily, "I work for Horton's."

"Is it all right if I sit down here? My name's Charlie Prince."

It turned out that Charlie Prince had seen the prospectus on the table, had once worked for Horton's himself, and couldn't resist stopping to ask how the old place was coming along.

"Well enough, I suppose," said Arthur, and then remarked, "I don't remember seeing you around."

"Oh, that was before your time, I suppose, and I'm sure the office is hardly encouraged to talk about me. You see, I'm sort of a blot on its escutcheon. I left under rather a cloud, if you get what I mean."

"Oh," said Arthur, and felt a quick, bitter envy for anyone who could afford to be incompetent, insubordinate even, and could leave a firm like Horton's so casually.

Charlie Prince, it appeared, read his thoughts quite accurately. "No," he said, "it doesn't have anything to do with my not being able to hold down the job, if that's what you're thinking. It was a bit of dishonesty; really. Some checks I forged—stuff like that."

Arthur's jaw dropped.

"I know," observed Charlie Prince cheerfully. "You figure that

when someone gets caught in a business like that he ought to be all tears and remorse, all sackcloth and ashes, and such. But I'm not. Oh, of course I was all remorse at getting caught by that idiot, meddling accountant, but you can hardly blame me for that."

"But why did you do it?"

Charlie Prince frowned. "I don't look like one of those silly psychopaths who just steals to get a thrill from it, do I? It was for money, of course. It's always for money."

"Always?"

"Oh, I worked in other places besides Horton's, and I was always leaving under a cloud. Matter of fact, it wasn't until I was in Horton's that I learned the biggest lesson of my life." He leaned forward and tapped his forefinger on the table significantly. "That business of tracing someone's signature is the bunk. Absolute bunk. If you're going to forge a name you just have to practice writing it free-hand, and keep on practicing until you can set it down slap dash, like that. It's the only way."

"But you got caught there, too."

"That was carelessness. I was cashing the checks, but I didn't bother to make entries about them in the books. And you know what an accountant can be if his books don't balance."

Arthur found himself fascinated, but also found himself unable to frame the question he wanted to ask and yet remain within the bounds of politeness. "Then what happened? Did they—did you—?"

"You mean, arrested, sent to jail, stuff like that?" Charlie Prince looked at Arthur pityingly. "Of course not. You know how those companies are about publicity like that, and when my father made the money good that's all there was to it."

"And nothing at all happened to you?" Arthur said, awestruck.

"Well," Charlie Prince admitted, "something *had* to happen, of course, especially after that last performance when my father boiled up like an old steam kettle about it. But it wasn't too bad, really. It was just that I became a sort of local remittance man."

"A what?" said Arthur blankly.

"A sort of local remittance man. You know how those old families in England would ship their black-sheep offspring off to Australia or somewhere just to keep them off the scene, then send them an allowance and tell them it would show up regularly as long as sonny stayed out of sight? Well, that's what happened to me. At first the old man was just going to heave me out into the cold and darkness without even a penny, but the women in my family have soft hearts

and he was convinced otherwise. I would get a monthly allowance—about half of what I needed to live on, as it turned out—but for the rest of my life I had to steer clear of my family and its whole circle. And I can tell you, it's a mighty big circle."

"Then you're not supposed to be in New York, are you?"

"I said I was a local remittance man. Meaning I can be anywhere I please as long as I'm not heard or seen by any of my family or its three million acquaintances. In which case I merely drop a note to the family lawyer stating my address, and on the first of each month I receive my allowance."

"Well," said Arthur, "considering everything, I'd say your father was being very decent about it."

Charlie Prince sighed. "Truth to tell, he's not a bad old sort at all. But he's cursed by a morbid yearning toward a certain kind of holy young prig which I am not. You know what I mean. The sort of young squirt who's all bland exterior, blank interior, and not a spark anywhere. If I had turned out like that, everything would have been just dandy. But I didn't. So here I am, a veritable Ishmael, two weeks before allowance comes due, locked out of his hotel room."

Arthur felt an inexplicable stirring of excitement. "Locked out?"

"That's what happens when you can't pay your rent. It's a law or a code or something. Anyhow, it's damn thoughtless, whatever it is, and what I'm leading up to is to ask if, in return for the story of my life, such as it is, you might see your way clear to making a loan. Not too small a one, either; a sort of medium-sized loan. I'll guarantee to pay you back the first of the month and with fair interest."

Charlie Prince's voice now had an openly pleading note. "I'll admit that I have my dishonest side, but I've never welshed on a debt in my whole life. Matter of fact," he explained, "the only reason I got myself into trouble was because I was so anxious to pay my debts."

Arthur looked at Charlie Prince's perfect clothes; he saw Charlie Prince's easy poise; he heard Charlie Prince's well modulated voice sounding pleasantly in his ears, and the stirring of excitement suddenly took meaning.

"Look," he said, "where do you live now?"

"Nowhere, of course—not as long as I'm locked out. But I'll meet you here the first of the month on the minute. I can swear you don't have to worry about getting the money back. The way I've been talking about things ought to prove I'm on the dead level with you."

"I don't mean that," said Arthur. "I mean, would you want to share a room with me? If I lent you enough money to clear up your

hotel bill and get your things out of there, would you move in with me? I've got a nice room; it's in an old house but very well kept. Mrs. Marsh—that is, the landlady—is the talky kind and very fussy about things, but you can see she's the sort to keep a place nice. And it's very cheap; it would save you a lot of money."

He stopped short then, with the realization that this was turning into a vehement sales talk and that Charlie Prince was regarding him quizzically.

"What is it?" said Charlie Prince. "Are you broke, too?"

"No, it has nothing to do with money. I have the money to lend you, don't I?"

"Then why the fever to share the room? Especially with me, that is."

Arthur took his courage in both hands. "All right, I'll tell you. You have something I want."

Charlie Prince blinked. "I do?"

"Listen to me," Arthur said. "I never had any of the things you had, and it shows. Somehow, it shows. I know it does, because you wouldn't ever talk to any of those young men, the sort your father likes, the way you talk to me. But I don't care about that. What I care about is finding out exactly what makes you like that, what makes them all like that. It's some kind of polish that a good family and money can rub on you so that it never comes off. And that's what I want."

Charlie Prince looked at him wonderingly. "And you think that if we share a room some of this mysterious polish, this whatever-it-is, will rub off on you?"

"You let me worry about that," said Arthur. He drew out his checkbook and a pen, and laid them on the table before him. "Well?" he said.

Charlie Prince studied the checkbook thoughtfully. "I'll admit I haven't any idea of what I'm selling," he said, "but it's a sale."

As it turned out, they made excellent roommates. There is no greater compatibility than that between a good talker and a good listener, and since Charlie Prince liked nothing better than to pump amiably from a bottomless well of anecdote and reminiscence, and Arthur made an almost feverishly interested audience, life in the second-floor front at Mrs. Marsh's rooming house was idyllic.

There were some very small flies in the ointment, of course. At times, Charlie Prince might have had cause to reflect that he had

found *too* good a listener in Arthur, considering Arthur's insatiable appetite for detail. It can be quite disconcerting for a raconteur embarked on the story of a yachting experience to find that he must describe the dimensions of the yacht, its structure, its method of operation, and then enter into a lecture on the comparative merits of various small boats before he can get to the point of the story itself. Or to draw full value from the narrative of an intriguing little episode concerning a young woman met in a certain restaurant when one is also required to add footnotes on the subjects of what to say to a maitre d', how to order, how to tip, how to dress for every occasion, and so on, ad infinitum.

It might also have distressed Charlie Prince, who had commendable powers of observation, to note that Arthur was becoming subtly cast in his own image. The inflection of voice, the choice of words and their usage, the manner of sitting, walking, standing, the gestures of hands, the very shades of expression which Arthur came to adopt, all had the rather uncomfortable quality of showing Charlie Prince to himself in a living mirror.

For Arthur's part, the one thing that really shocked him in the relationship was the discovery of the childishness of Charlie Prince and his small world. From all he could gather, Arthur decided somberly, Charlie Prince and his like emerged from childhood into adolescence and stopped short there. Physically, they might grow still larger and more impressive, but mentally and emotionally, they were all they would ever be. They would learn adult catchwords and mannerisms, but underneath? Of course, it was nothing that Arthur ever chose to mention aloud.

His feeling on the subject was heightened by the matter of Charlie Prince's allowance. On the first of each month, Mrs. Marsh would smilingly enter the room bearing an envelope addressed to Charlie Prince. It was an expensive-looking envelope, and if one held it up to the light reflectively, as Charlie always did before opening it, it was possible to make out the outlines of an expensive-looking slip of paper. A check for five hundred dollars signed by James Llewellyn. "The family's personal lawyer," Charlie had once explained, and added with some bitterness, "It wasn't hard enough having one father like mine, so old Llewellyn's been playing second father since I was a kid."

To Charlie Prince, the amount was a pittance. To Arthur it was the key. The key to the enchanted garden just outside Arthur's reach; the key to Bluebeard's chamber which you were forbidden to

use; the key to Ann Horton. It would not pay for what you wanted, but it would open the door.

Even more tantalizing to Arthur was the fact that for a few hours each month it was all his. Charlie Prince would endorse it, and then Arthur would obligingly stop in at the bank where he had his own small account and cash it there. On his return, he would carefully deduct the amount of Charlie's share of the rent, the amount that Charlie had borrowed from him the last week or two of the preceding month, and then turn the rest over to his roommate. It was at Charlie's insistence that he did this. "If you want to make sure that I'm square with my rent and whatever I owe you," he had explained, "this is the best way. Besides, you can cash it easily, and I seem to have a lot of trouble that way."

Thus, for a few hours each month, Arthur was another man. Charlie Prince was generous about lending his wardrobe, and Arthur made it a point, on check-cashing day especially, to wear one of those wondrously cut and textured suits which looked as if it had been tailored for him. And in the breast pocket of that suit was a wallet containing five hundred dollars in crisp new bills. It was no wonder that it happened to be one of those days on which he made the impression he had dreamed of making.

He entered his employer's office, and Ann Horton was seated on a corner of the desk there, talking to her father. She glanced at Arthur as he stood there, and then stopped short in what she was saying to look him up and down with open admiration.

"Well," she said to her father, "I've seen this young man here and there in the office several times. Don't you think it's about time you had the manners to introduce us?"

Her manner of address startled Arthur, who had somehow always visualized Mr. Horton as a forbidding figure poised on a mountaintop fingering a thunderbolt. But it was even more startling when Mr. Horton, after what seemed to be a moment of uncertain recognition, made the introduction in terms that sounded like music to Arthur's ears. Arthur, he said warmly, was a fine young man. It would be a pleasure to introduce him.

That was Arthur's golden opportunity—and he flubbed it. Flubbed it miserably. What he said was pointless; the way he said it made it sound even more mawkish and clumsy than seemed possible. And even while he was watching the glow fade from Ann Horton's face

he knew what the trouble was, and cursed himself and the whole world for it.

The money wasn't *his*, that was the thing. If it were, he could be seeing her that evening, and the next, and the one after that. But it wasn't. It was a meaningless bulge in his wallet that could take him this far, and no farther. And that knowledge made everything else meaningless: the clothes, the manner, everything he had made himself into. Without the money, it was all nonsense. With it—

With it! He had been looking merely ill at ease; now he looked physically ill under the impact of the thought that struck him. An instant concern showed in Ann Horton's lovely eyes. Apparently she was a girl with strong maternal instinct.

"You're not well," she said.

The idea, the glorious realization, was a flame roaring through him now. He rose from it like a phoenix.

"No, I don't feel very well," he answered, and could hardly recognize his own voice as he spoke, "but it's nothing serious. Really, it isn't."

"Well, you ought to go home right now," she said firmly. "I have the car downstairs, and it won't be any trouble at all."

Arthur mentally struck himself on the forehead with his fist. He had thrown away one opportunity—did he have to throw this one away as well? Yet Mrs. Marsh's rooming house had never appeared as wretched as it did just then; it was impossible to have her drive him there.

Inspiration put the words into his mouth, the proper words to impress father and daughter. "There's so much work to be done," said Arthur, wistfully courageous, "that I can't possibly leave it." And then he added with as much ease as if he had practiced the lines for hours, "But I do want to see you again. Do you think if I called tomorrow evening—?"

After that, he told himself grimly whenever the fire inside him threatened to flicker uncertainly, he had no choice. And Charlie Prince, of course, was not even offered a choice. At exactly seven minutes before midnight, after considerable choked protest and thrashing around, Charlie Prince lay dead on his bed. Entirely dead, although Arthur's fingers remained clasped around his throat for another long minute just to make sure.

It has been remarked that the man with the likeliest chance of getting away with murder is the man who faces his victim in a

crowd, fires a bullet into him, and then walks off—which is a way of saying that it is the devious and overly ingenious method of murder that will hang the murderer. To that extent, Arthur had committed his murder wisely, although not out of any wisdom.

The fact is that from the moment he had left Ann Horton to the moment he finally released his fingers from Charlie Prince's throat he had lived in a sort of blind fever of knowing what had to be done without a thought of how it was to be done. And when at last he stood looking down at the body before him, with the full horror of what had happened bursting in his mind, he was at a complete loss. The soul had departed, no question about that. But the body remained, and what in the Lord's name was one to do with it?

He could bundle it into the closet, get it out of sight at least, but what would be the point of that? Mrs. Marsh came in every morning to make up the room and empty the wastebaskets. Since there was no lock on the closet door, there was no way of keeping her out of it.

Or take Charlie Prince's trunk standing there in the corner. He could deposit the body in it and ship it somewhere. Ship it where? He put his mind to the question desperately, but was finally forced to the conclusion that there was no place in the world to which you could ship a trunk with a body in it and rest assured that murder wouldn't out.

But he was on the right track with that trunk, and when the solution came at last he recognized it instantly and eagerly. The storage room in Mrs. Marsh's was a dank cavern in the depths of the house, barred by a heavy door, which, though never locked, made it a desolate and chilly place no matter what the season. Since there was no traffic in that room, a body could mold there for years without anyone being the wiser. Eventually, it could be disposed of with no difficulty. The object now was to get it into the trunk and down to the storage room.

To Arthur's annoyance, he discovered that even though the trunk was a large one it made a tight fit, and it was a messy business getting everything arranged neatly. But at last he had it bolted tightly and out into the hallway. It was when he was midway down the stairs that the accident happened. He felt the trunk slipping down his back, gave it a violent heave to right it, and the next instant saw it go sliding over his head to crash down the rest of the distance to the floor with a thunder that shook the house. He was

after it in an instant, saw that it remained firmly bolted, and then realized that he was standing eye to eye with Mrs. Marsh.

She was poised there like a frightened apparition, clad in a white flannel nightgown that fell to her ankles, her fingers to her lips, her eyes wide.

"Dear me," she said, "dear me, you should be more careful!"

Arthur flung himself in front of the trunk as if she had vision that could penetrate its walls. "I'm sorry," he stammered, "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to make any noise, but somehow it slipped."

She shook her head with gentle severity. "You might have scratched the walls. Or hurt yourself."

"No," he assured her hastily, "there's no damage done. None."

She peered around him at the trunk. "Why, that's that nice Mr. Prince's trunk, isn't it? Wherever can you be taking it at this hour?"

Arthur felt the perspiration start on his forehead. "Nowhere," he said hoarsely, and then when she knit her brows in wonder at this he quickly added, "That is, to the storage room. You see, Charlie—Mr. Prince—was supposed to give me a hand with it, but when he didn't show up I decided to try it myself."

"But it must be so heavy."

Her warmly sympathetic tone served nicely to steady his nerves. His thoughts started to move now with the smooth precision of the second hand on a good watch. "I suppose it is," he said, and laughed deprecatingly, "but it seemed better to do it myself than keep waiting for Mr. Prince to help. He's very unreliable, you know. Just takes off when he wants to, and you never know how long he'll be gone."

"I think it's a shame," said Mrs. Marsh firmly.

"No, no, he's a bit eccentric, but really very nice when you get to know him." Arthur took a grip on the trunk. "I'll get it down the rest of the way easily enough," he said.

A thought struck Mrs. Marsh. "Oh, dear me," she chirped, "perhaps everything did happen for the best. I mean, your making a noise and bringing me out and all. You see, there's a lock on the storage room now and you'd never have got in. I'll just slip on a robe and take care of that."

She went ahead of him down the creaking cellar steps and waited in the storage room until he trundled the trunk into it. A dim light burned there, and, as he had remembered, dust lay thick over everything in sight. Mrs. Marsh shook her head over it.

"It's dreadful," she said, "but there's really no point in trying to do anything about it. Why, I don't believe anyone uses this room

from one year to the next! The only reason I put the lock on the door was because the insurance company wanted it there."

Arthur shifted from one foot to the other. His mission completed, he was willing—in fact, anxious—to leave, but Mrs. Marsh seemed oblivious to this. "I don't encourage transients," she said. "What I like is a nice steady gentleman boarder who's no fuss and bother. Now, take that trunk there—" she pointed a bony forefinger at what appeared to be a mound of ashes, but which proved on a second look to be a trunk buried under years of dust—"when that gentleman moved in—"

Arthur found himself swaying on his feet while the gentle chirping went on and on. In this fashion he learned about the gentleman in the first-floor rear, the gentleman in the second-floor rear, and the gentleman in the third-floor front. It was as though her conversational stream had been dammed up so long that now it was released there was no containing it. And through it all he sustained himself with one thought. He had got away with murder—really and literally got away with murder. When the door to the storage room closed behind him, Charlie Prince could rot away without a soul in the world being the wiser. The checks would come every month, five hundred dollars each and every month, and there was Ann Horton and the world of glory ahead. The best of everything, Arthur thought in and around Mrs. Marsh's unwearying voice, and he knew then what it felt like to be an emperor incognito.

The monologue had to come to an end sometime, the heavy door was locked and stayed locked, and Arthur entered his new station with the confidence that is supposed to be the lot of the righteous but which may also come to those who have got away with murder and know it beyond the shadow of a doubt. And even the tiniest fragment of unease could not possibly remain after he met Mrs. Marsh in the hallway one evening a few weeks later.

"You were right," she said, pursing her lips sympathetically. "Mr. Prince is eccentric, isn't he?"

"He is?" said Arthur uncertainly.

"Oh, yes. Like practicing writing his name on every piece of paper he can get his hands on. Just one sheet of paper after another with nothing on it but his name!"

Arthur abruptly remembered his wastebasket, and then thought with a glow of undeserved self-admiration how everything, even unforgivable carelessness, worked for him.

"I'm sure," observed Mrs. Marsh, "that a grown man can find better things to do with his time than that. It just goes to show you."

"Yes," said Arthur, "it certainly does."

So, serenity reigned over Mrs. Marsh's. It reigned elsewhere, too, since Arthur had no difficulty at all in properly endorsing those precious checks, and even less trouble in spending the money. Using Charlie Prince's wardrobe as his starting point, he built his into a thing of quiet splendor. Drawing from Charlie Prince's narratives, he went to the places where one should be seen, and behaved as one should behave. His employer beamed on him with a kindly eye which became almost affectionate when Arthur mentioned the income a generous aunt had provided for him, and his acquaintance with Ann Horton, who had seemed strangely drawn to him from the first evening they spent together, soon blossomed into romance.

He found Ann Horton everything he had ever imagined—passionate, charming, devoted. Of course, she had her queer little reticences—dark little places in her own background that she chose not to touch upon—but, as he reminded himself, who was he to cast stones? So he behaved himself flawlessly up to the point where they had to discuss the wedding, and then they had their first quarrel.

There was no question about the wedding itself. It was to take place in June, the month of brides; it was to be followed by a luxurious honeymoon, after which Arthur would enter into a position of importance in the affairs of Horton & Son at a salary commensurate with that position. No, there was no question about the wedding—the envy in the eyes of every fine young man who had ever courted Ann Horton attested to that—but there was a grave question about the ceremony.

"But *why* do you insist on a big ceremony?" she demanded. "I think they're dreadful things. All those people and all that fuss. It's like a Roman circus."

He couldn't explain to her, and that complicated matters. After all, there is no easy way of explaining to any girl that her wedding is not only to be a nuptial, but also a sweet measure of revenge. It would be all over the papers; the whole world of fine young men would be on hand to witness it. They had to be there or it would be tasteless in the mouth.

"And why do you insist on a skimpy little private affair?" he asked in turn. "I should think a girl's wedding would be the most important thing in the world to her. That she'd want to do it up proud. Standing

there in the living room with your father and aunt doesn't seem like any ceremony at all."

"But you'll be there, too," she said. "That's what makes it a ceremony."

He was not to be put off by any such feminine wit, however, and he let her know it. In the end, she burst into tears and fled, leaving him as firm in his convictions as ever. If it cost him his neck, he told himself angrily, he was not going to have any hit-and-run affair fobbed off on him as the real thing. He'd have the biggest cathedral in town, the most important people—the best of everything.

When they met again she was in a properly chastened mood, so he was properly magnanimous. "Darling," she said, "did you think I was very foolish carrying on the way I did?"

"Of course not, Ann. Don't you think I understand how high-strung you are, and how seriously you take this?"

"You are a darling, Arthur," she said, "really you are. And perhaps, in a way, your insistence on a big ceremony has done more for us than you'll ever understand."

"In what way?" he asked.

"I can't tell you that. But I can tell you that I haven't been as happy in years as I'm going to be if things work out."

"What things?" he asked, completely at sea in the face of this feminine ambiguity.

"Before I can even talk about it there's one question you must answer, Arthur. And, please, promise you'll answer truthfully."

"Of course I will."

"Then you can find it in your heart to forgive someone who's done a great wrong? Someone who's done wrong, but suffered for it?"

He grimaced inwardly. "Of course I can. I don't care what wrong anyone's done, it's my nature to forgive him." He almost said *her* but caught himself in time. After all, if that was the way she wanted to build up to a maidenly confession, why spoil it? But there seemed to be no confession forthcoming. She said nothing more about the subject—instead, spent the rest of the evening in such a giddy discussion of plans and arrangements that by the time he left her the matter was entirely forgotten.

He was called into Mr. Horton's office late the next afternoon, and when he entered the room he saw Ann there. From her expression and from her father's, he could guess what they had been discussing, and he felt a pleasant triumph in that knowledge.

"Arthur," said Mr. Horton, "please sit down." Arthur sat down, crossed his legs, and smiled at Ann. "Arthur," said Mr. Horton, "I have something serious to discuss with you."

"Yes, sir," said Arthur, and waited patiently for Mr. Horton to finish arranging three pencils, a pen, a letter opener, a memorandum pad, and a telephone before him on the desk.

"Arthur," Mr. Horton said at last, "what I'm going to tell you is something few people know, and I hope you will follow their example and never discuss it with anyone else."

"Yes, sir," said Arthur.

"Ann has told me that you insist on a big ceremony with all the trimmings, and that's what makes the problem. A private ceremony would have left things as they were, and no harm done. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir," said Arthur, lying valiantly. He looked furtively at Ann, but no clue was to be found there. "Of course, sir," he said.

"Then, since I'm a man who likes to get to the point quickly, I will tell you that I have a son. You're very much like him—in fact, Ann and I were both struck by that resemblance some time ago—but unfortunately my son happens to be a thoroughgoing scoundrel, and after one trick too many he was simply bundled off to fend for himself on an allowance I provided. I haven't heard from him since—my lawyer takes care of the details—but if there is to be a big ceremony with everyone on hand to ask questions, he must be there. You understand that, of course."

The room seemed to be closing in around Arthur, and Mr. Horton's face was suddenly a diabolic mask floating against the wall.

"Yes, sir," Arthur whispered.

"That means I must do something now that Ann's been after me to do for years. I have the boy's address; we're all going over right now to meet him, to talk to him and see if he can't get off to a fresh start with your example before him."

"Prince Charlie," said Ann fondly. "That's what we all used to call him, he was so charming."

The walls were very close now, the walls of a black chamber, and Ann's face floating alongside her father's. And, strangely enough, there was the face of Mrs. Marsh. The kindly, garrulous face of Mrs. Marsh growing so much bigger than the others.

And a trunk, waiting.

Daphne du Maurier

Don't Look Now

“Don't look now,” John said to his wife, “but there are a couple of old girls two tables away who are trying to hypnotize me.”

Laura, quick on cue, made an elaborate pretense of yawning, then tilted her head as though searching the skies for a nonexistent airplane.

“Right behind you,” he added. “That's why you can't turn round at once—it would be much too obvious.”

Laura played the oldest trick in the world and dropped her napkin, then bent to scramble for it under her feet, sending a shooting glance over her left shoulder as she straightened once again. She sucked in her cheeks, the first telltale sign of suppressed hysteria, and lowered her head.

“They're not old girls at all,” she said. “They're male twins in drag.” Her voice broke ominously, the prelude to uncontrolled laughter, and John quickly poured some more chianti into her glass.

“Pretend to choke,” he said, “then they won't notice. You know what it is—they're criminals doing the sights of Europe, changing sex at each stop. Twin sisters here on Torcello. Twin brothers tomorrow in Venice, or even tonight, parading arm-in-arm across the Piazza San Marco. Just a matter of switching clothes and wigs.”

“Jewel thieves or murderers?” asked Laura.

“Oh, murderers, definitely. But why, I ask myself, have they picked on me?”

The waiter made a diversion by bringing coffee and bearing away the fruit, which gave Laura time to banish hysteria and regain control. “I can't think,” she said, “why we didn't notice them when we arrived. They stand out to high heaven. One couldn't fail.”

“That gang of Americans masked them,” said John, “and the bearded man with a monocle who looked like a spy. It wasn't until they all went just now that I saw the twins. Oh, God, the one with the shock of white hair has got her eye on me again.”

Laura took the compact from her bag and held it in front of her face, the mirror acting as a reflector.

“I think it's me they're looking at, not you,” she said. “Thank heaven I left my pearls with the manager at the hotel.” She paused,

dabbing the sides of her nose with powder. "The thing is," she said after a moment, "we've got them wrong. They're neither murderers nor thieves. They're a couple of pathetic old retired schoolmistresses on holiday, who've saved up all their lives to visit Venice. They come from someplace with a name like Walabanga in Australia. And they're called Tilly and Tiny."

Her voice, for the first time since they had come away, took on the old bubbling quality he loved, and the worried frown between her brows had vanished. At last, he thought, at last she's beginning to get over it. If I can keep this going, if we can pick up the familiar routine of jokes shared on holiday and at home, the ridiculous fantasies about people at other tables, or staying in the hotel, or wandering in art galleries and churches, then everything will fall into place, life will become as it was before, the wound will heal, she will forget.

"You know," said Laura, "that really was a very good lunch. I did enjoy it."

Thank God, he thought, thank God. Then he leaned forward, speaking low in a conspirator's whisper. "One of them is going to the loo," he said. "Do you suppose he, or she, is going to change the wig?"

"Don't say anything," Laura murmured. "I'll follow her and find out. She may have a suitcase tucked away there, and she's going to switch clothes." She began to hum under her breath—the signal, to her husband, of content. The ghost was temporarily laid, and all because of the familiar holiday game, abandoned too long, and now, through mere chance, blissfully recaptured.

"Is she on her way?" asked Laura.

"About to pass our table now," he told her.

Seen on her own, the woman was not so remarkable. Tall, angular, aquiline features—with the close-cropped hair fashionably called an Eton crop, he seemed to remember, in his mother's day, and about her person the stamp of that particular generation. She would be in her middle sixties, he supposed, the masculine shirt with collar and tie, sports jacket, grey-tweed skirt coming to mid-calf. Grey stockings and laced black shoes. He had seen the type on golf courses and at dog shows—invariably showing not sporting breeds but pugs—and if you came across them at a party in somebody's house they were quicker on the draw with a cigarette-lighter than he was himself, a mere male, with pocket-matches. The general belief that they kept house with a more feminine, fluffy companion was not

always true. Frequently they boasted, and adored, a golfing husband. No, the striking point about this particular individual was that there were two of them. Identical twins cast in the same mold. The only difference was that the other one had whiter hair.

Squaring her shoulders, Laura rose to her feet. "I simply must not laugh," she said, "and whatever you do don't look at me when I come back, especially if we come out together." She picked up her bag and strolled self-consciously away from the table in pursuit of her prey.

John poured the dregs of the chianti into his glass and lit a cigarette. The sun blazed down upon the little garden of the restaurant. The Americans had left, and the monocled man, and the family party at the far end. All was peace. The identical twin was sitting back in her chair with her eyes closed. Thank heaven, he thought, for this moment at any rate, when relaxation was possible, and Laura had been launched on her foolish, harmless game. The holiday could yet turn into the cure she needed, blotting out, if only temporarily, the numb despair that had seized her since the child died.

"She'll get over it," the doctor said. "They all get over it in time. And you have the boy."

"I know," John had said, "but the girl meant everything. She always did, right from the start, I don't know why. I suppose it was the difference in age. A boy of school age, and a tough one at that, is someone in his own right. Not a baby of five. Laura literally adored her. Johnnie and I were nowhere."

"Give her time," repeated the doctor, "give her time. And anyway, you're both young still. There'll be others. Another daughter."

So easy to talk. How replace the life of a loved lost child with a dream? He knew Laura too well. Another child, another girl, would have her own qualities, a separate identity, she might even induce hostility because of this very fact. A usurper in the cradle, in the cot, that had been Christine's. A chubby, flaxen replica of Johnnie, not the little waxen dark-haired sprite that had gone.

He looked up over his glass of wine and the woman was staring at him again. It was not the casual, idle glance of someone at a nearby table waiting for her companion to return, but something deeper, more intent, the prominent light-blue eyes oddly penetrating, giving him a sudden feeling of discomfort.

Damn the woman! All right, bloody stare, if you must. Two can play at that game. He blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air and smiled at her, he hoped offensively. She did not register. The blue eyes continued to hold his, so that he was obliged to look away

himself, extinguish his cigarette, glance over his shoulder for the waiter, and call for the bill. Settling it, and fumbling with the change, with a few casual remarks about the excellence of the meal, brought composure, but a prickly feeling on his scalp remained, and an odd sensation of unease. Then it went, as abruptly as it had started, and stealing a furtive glance at the other table he saw that her eyes were closed again, and she was sleeping, or dozing, as she had done before. The waiter disappeared. All was still.

Laura, he thought, glancing at his watch, was being a hell of a time. Ten minutes at least. Something to tease her about, anyway. He began to plan the form the joke would take. How the old dolly had stripped to her smalls, suggesting that Laura should do likewise, and then the manager had burst in upon them both, exclaiming in horror, the reputation of the restaurant damaged, the hint that unpleasant consequences might follow unless— The whole exercise turning out to be a plant, an exercise in blackmail. He and Laura and the twins taken in a police launch back to Venice for questioning.

Quarter of an hour! Oh, come on, come on.

There was a crunch of feet on the gravel. Laura's twin walked slowly past, alone. She crossed over to her table and stood there a moment, her tall, angular figure interposing itself between John and her sister. She was saying something, but he couldn't catch the words. What was the accent, though—Scottish? Then she bent, offering an arm to the seated twin, and they moved away together across the garden to the break in the little hedge beyond, the twin who had stared at John leaning on her sister's arm. Here was the difference again. She was not quite so tall, and she stooped more—perhaps she was arthritic. They disappeared out of sight, and John, impatient, got up and was about to walk back into the hotel when Laura emerged.

"Well, I must say you took your time," he began, and then stopped, because of the expression on her face. "What's the matter, what's happened?" he asked.

He could tell at once there was something wrong. Almost as if she were in a state of shock. She blundered toward the table he had just vacated and sat down. He drew up a chair beside her, taking her hand. "Darling, what is it? Tell me—are you ill?"

She shook her head and then turned and looked at him. The dazed expression he had noticed at first had given way to one of dawning confidence, almost of exaltation.

"It's quite wonderful," she said slowly, "the most wonderful thing that could possibly be. You see, she isn't dead, she's still with us. That's why they kept staring at us, those two sisters. They could see Christine."

Oh, God, he thought. It's what I've been dreading. She's going off her head. What do I do? How do I cope?

"Laura, sweet," he began, forcing a smile, "look, shall we go? I've paid the bill, we can go and look at the cathedral and stroll around, and then it will be time to take off in that launch again for Venice."

She wasn't listening, or at any rate the words didn't penetrate. "John, love," she said, "I've got to tell you what happened. I followed her, as we planned, into the *toilette*. She was combing her hair and I went into the loo, and then came out and washed my hands in the basin. She was washing hers in the next basin. Suddenly she turned and said to me in a strong Scots accent, 'Don't be unhappy any more. My sister has seen your little girl. She was sitting between you and your husband, laughing.' Darling, I thought I was going to faint. I nearly did. Luckily, there was a chair, and I sat down, and the woman bent over me and patted my head. I'm not sure of her exact words, but she said something about the moment of truth and joy being as sharp as a sword, but not to be afraid, all was well, but the sister's vision had been so strong they knew I had to be told, and that Christine wanted it. Oh, John, don't look like that. I swear I'm not making it up—this is what she told me, it's all true."

The desperate urgency in her voice made his heart sicken. He had to play along with her, agree, soothe, do anything to bring back some sense of calm. "Laura, darling, of course I believe you," he said, "only it's a sort of shock, and I'm upset because you're upset."

"But I'm not upset," she interrupted. "I'm happy, so happy that I can't put the feeling into words. You know what it's been like all these weeks, at home and everywhere we've been on holiday, though I tried to hide it from you. Now it's lifted, because I know, I just know, that the woman was right."

"Oh, Lord, how awful of me, I've forgotten their name—she did tell me. You see, the thing is that she's a retired doctor, they come from Edinburgh, and the one who saw Christine went blind a few years ago. Although she's studied the occult all her life and been very psychic, it's only since going blind that she has really seen things, like a medium. They've had the most wonderful experiences. But to describe Christine as the blind one did to her sister, even down to the little blue-and-white dress with the puff sleeves that

she wore at her birthday party, and to say she was smiling happily—Oh, darling, it's made me so happy I think I'm going to cry."

No hysteria. Nothing wild. She took a tissue from her bag and blew her nose, smiling at him. "I'm all right, you don't have to worry. Neither of us need worry about anything any more. Give me a cigarette."

He took one from his packet and lighted it for her. She sounded normal, herself again. She wasn't trembling. And if this sudden belief was going to keep her happy he couldn't possibly begrudge it. But—but he wished all the same it hadn't happened. There was something uncanny about thought-reading, about telepathy. Scientists couldn't account for it, nobody could, and this is what must have happened just now between Laura and the sisters.

So the one who had been staring at him was blind. That accounted for the fixed gaze. Which somehow was unpleasant in itself, creepy. Oh, hell, he thought, I wish we hadn't come here for lunch. Just chance, a flick of a coin between Torcello and driving to Padua. And we had to choose Torcello. "You didn't arrange to meet them again or anything, did you?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

"No, darling, why should I?" Laura answered. "I mean, there was nothing more they could tell me. The sister had had her wonderful vision, and that was that. Anyway, they're moving on. Funnily enough, it's rather like our original game. They *are* going round the world before returning to Scotland. Only I said Australia, didn't I? The old dears. Anything less like murderers and jewel thieves."

She had quite recovered. She stood up and looked about her. "Come on," she said. "Having come to Torcello, we must see the cathedral."

They made their way from the restaurant across the open piazza, where the stalls had been set up with scarves and trinkets and postcards, and so along the path to the cathedral. One of the ferryboats had just decanted a crowd of sightseers, many of whom had already found their way into Santa Maria Assunta.

Laura, undaunted, asked her husband for the guidebook, and as had always been her custom in happier days started to walk slowly through the cathedral, studying mosaics, columns, panels from left to right, while John, less interested because of his concern at what had just happened, followed close behind, keeping a weather eye alert for the twin sisters.

There was no sign of them. Perhaps they had gone into the church of Santa Fosca close by. A sudden encounter would be embarrassing,

quite apart from the effect it might have on Laura. The anonymous, shuffling tourists, intent upon culture, could not harm her—although from his own point of view they made artistic appreciation impossible. He couldn't concentrate, the cold clear beauty of what he saw left him untouched, and when Laura touched his sleeve, pointing to the mosaic of the Virgin and Child standing above the frieze of the Apostles, he nodded in sympathy yet saw nothing, the long sad face of the Virgin infinitely remote, and, turning on sudden impulse, stared back over the heads of the tourists toward the door, where frescoes of the blessed and the damned gave themselves to judgment.

The twins were standing there, the blind one still holding onto her sister's arm, her sightless eyes fixed firmly upon him. He felt himself held, unable to move, and an impending sense of doom, of tragedy, came over him. His whole being sagged, as it were, in apathy, and he thought, This is the end—there is no escape, no future. Then both sisters turned and went out of the cathedral and the sensation vanished, leaving indignation in its wake, and rising anger. How dare those two old fools practice their mediumistic tricks on him? It was fraudulent, unhealthy—this was probably the way they lived, touring the world, making everyone they met uncomfortable. Give them half a chance and they would have got money out of Laura—anything.

He felt her tugging at his sleeve again. "Isn't she beautiful? So happy, so serene."

"Who? What?"

"The Madonna," she answered. "She has a magic quality. It goes right through to one. Don't you feel it?"

"I suppose so. I don't know. There are too many people around."

She looked up at him, astonished. "What's that got to do with it? How funny you are. Well, all right, let's get away from them. I want to buy some postcards, anyway." Disappointed by his lack of interest, she began to thread her way through the crowd of tourists to the door.

"Come on," he said abruptly once they were outside, "there's plenty of time for postcards—let's explore a bit." And he struck off from the path which would have taken them back to the center where the little houses were, and the stalls, and the drifting crowd of people, to a narrow way amongst uncultivated ground, beyond which he could see a sort of cutting, or canal. The sight of water—limpid, pale—was a soothing contrast to the fierce sun above their heads.

"I don't think this leads anywhere much," said Laura. "It's a bit

muddy, too, one can't sit. Besides, there are more things the guide-book says we ought to see."

"Oh, forget the book," he said impatiently, and, pulling her down beside him on the bank above the cutting, put his arms around her. "It's the wrong time of day for sightseeing. Look, there's a rat swimming there, the other side."

He picked up a stone and threw it in the water, and the animal sank, or somehow disappeared, and nothing was left but bubbles.

"Don't," said Laura. "It's cruel, poor thing," and then suddenly, putting her hand on his knee, "Do you think Christine is sitting here beside us?"

He didn't answer at once. What was there to say? Would it be like this forever?

"I expect so," he said slowly, "if you feel she is."

The point was, remembering Christine before the onset of the fatal meningitis, she would have been running along the bank excitedly, throwing off her shoes, wanting to paddle, giving Laura a fit of apprehension. "Sweetheart, take care, come back—"

"The woman said she was looking so happy, sitting beside us, smiling," said Laura. She got up, brushing her dress, her mood changed to restlessness. "Come on, let's go back."

He followed her with a sinking heart. He knew she didn't really want to buy postcards or see what remained to be seen—she wanted to go in search of the women again, not necessarily to talk, just to be near them. When they came to the open place by the stalls, he noticed that the crowd of tourists had thinned, there were only a few stragglers left, and the sisters were not amongst them. They must have joined the others who had come to Torcello by the ferry service. A wave of relief seized him.

"Look, there's a mass of postcards at the second stall," he said quickly, "and some eye-catching head scarves. Let me buy you a scarf."

"Darling, I've so many!" she protested. "Don't waste your lire."

"It isn't a waste. I'm in a buying mood. What about a basket? You know we never have enough baskets. Or some lace. How about lace?"

She allowed herself, laughing, to be dragged to the stall. While he rumpled through the goods spread out before them, and chatted up the smiling woman who was selling her wares, his ferociously bad Italian making her smile the more, he knew it would give the body of tourists more time to walk to the landing stage and catch

the ferry service, and the twin sisters would be out of sight and out of their life.

"Never," said Laura some twenty minutes later, "has so much junk been piled into so small a basket," her bubbling laugh reassuring him that all was well, he needn't worry any more, the evil hour had passed. The launch from the Cipriani that had brought them from Venice was waiting by the landing-stage. The passengers who had arrived with them, the Americans, the man with the monocle, were already assembled. Earlier, before setting out, he had thought the price for lunch and transport there and back decidedly steep. Now he grudged none of it, except that the outing to Torcello itself had been one of the major errors of this particular holiday in Venice. They stepped down into the launch, finding a place in the open, and the boat chugged away down the canal and into the lagoon. The ordinary ferry had gone before, steaming toward Murano, while their own craft headed past San Francesco del Deserto and so back direct to Venice.

He put his arm around her once more, holding her close, and this time she responded, smiling up at him, her head on his shoulder. "It's been a lovely day," she said. "I shall never forget it, never. You know, darling, now at last I can begin to enjoy our holiday."

He wanted to shout with relief. It's going to be all right, he decided, let her believe what she likes, it doesn't matter, it makes her happy. The beauty of Venice rose before them, sharply outlined against the glowing sky, and there was still so much to see, wandering there together, that might now be perfect because of her change of mood, the shadow having lifted, and aloud he began to discuss the evening to come, where they would dine—not the restaurant they usually went to, near the Fenice Theater, but somewhere different, somewhere new.

"Yes, but it must be cheap," she said, falling in with his mood, "because we've already spent so much today."

Their hotel by the Grand Canal had a welcoming, comforting air. The clerk smiled as he handed over their key. The bedroom was familiar, like home, with Laura's things arranged neatly on the dressing-table, but with it the little festive atmosphere of strangeness, of excitement, that only a holiday bedroom brings.

This is ours for the moment, John thought, but no more. While we are in it we bring it life. When we have gone, it no longer exists, it fades into anonymity. He turned on both taps in the bathroom,

the water gushing into the bath, the steam rising. Now, he thought afterward, now at last is the moment to make love, and he went back into the bedroom, and she understood, and opened her arms and smiled. Such blessed relief after all those weeks of restraint.

"The thing is," she said later, fixing her earrings before the looking-glass, "I'm not really terribly hungry. Shall we just be dull and eat in the dining room here?"

"God, no!" he exclaimed. "With all those rather dreary couples at the other tables? I'm ravenous. I also want to get rather sloshed."

"Not bright lights and music, surely?"

"No, no—some small, dark, intimate cave, rather sinister, full of lovers with other people's wives."

"Hm," sniffed Laura, "we all know what that means. You'll spot some Italian lovely of sixteen and smirk at her through dinner, while I'm stuck high and dry with a beastly man's broad back."

They went out laughing into the warm soft night, and the magic was about them everywhere. "Let's walk," he said. "Let's walk and work up an appetite for our gigantic meal," and inevitably they found themselves by the Molo and the lapping gondolas dancing upon the water, the lights everywhere blending with the darkness. There were other couples strolling for the same sake of aimless enjoyment, backward, forward, purposeless, and the inevitable sailors in groups, noisy, gesticulating, and dark-eyed girls whispering, clicking on high heels.

"The trouble is," said Laura, "walking in Venice becomes compulsive once you start. Just over the next bridge, you say, and then the next one beckons. I'm sure there are no restaurants down here—we're almost at those public gardens where they hold the Biennale. Let's turn back. I know there's a restaurant somewhere near the church of San Zaccaria, there's a little alleyway leading to it."

"Tell you what," said John. "If we go down here by the Arsenal and cross that bridge at the end and head left, we'll come upon San Zaccaria from the other side. We did it the other morning."

"Yes, but it was daylight then. We may lose our way—it's not very well lit."

"Don't fuss. I have an instinct for these things."

They turned down the Fondamenta dell' Arsenal and crossed the little bridge short of the Arsenal itself, and so on past the church of San Martino. There were two canals ahead, one bearing right, the

other left, with narrow streets beside them. John hesitated. Which one was it they had walked beside the day before?

"You see," protested Laura, "we'll be lost, just as I said."

"Nonsense," replied John firmly. "It's the left-hand one—I remember the little bridge."

The canal was narrow, the houses on either side seemed to close in upon it, and in the daytime, with the sun's reflection on the water and the windows of the houses open, bedding upon the balconies, a canary singing in a cage, there had been an impression of warmth, of secluded shelter. Now, ill-lit, almost in darkness, the windows of the houses shuttered, the water dank, the scene appeared altogether different—neglected, poor, and the long narrow boats moored to the slippery steps of cellar entrances looked like coffins.

"I swear I don't remember this bridge," said Laura, pausing and holding onto the rail, "and I don't like the look of that alleyway beyond."

"There's a lamp halfway up," John told her. "I know exactly where we are—not far from the Greek quarter."

They crossed the bridge and were about to plunge into the alleyway when they heard the cry. It came, surely, from one of the houses on the opposite side, but which one it was impossible to say. With the shutters closed, each one of them seemed dead.

They turned and stared in the direction from which the sound had come. "What was it?" whispered Laura.

"Some drunk or other," said John briefly. "Come on."

Less like a drunk than someone being strangled, and the choking cry suppressed as the grip held firm.

"We ought to call the police!" said Laura.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," said John. Where did she think she was—Piccadilly?

"Well, I'm off—it's sinister," she replied, and began to hurry away up the twisting alleyway.

John hesitated, his eye caught by a small figure which suddenly crept from a cellar entrance below one of the opposite houses and then jumped into a narrow boat below. It was a child, a little girl—she couldn't have been more than five or six—wearing a short coat over her minute skirt, a pixie hood covering her head. There were four boats moored, line upon line, and she proceeded to jump from one to the other with surprising agility—intent, it would seem, upon escape. Once her foot slipped and he caught his breath, for she was within a few feet of the water, losing balance, then she recovered

and hopped onto the farthest boat. Bending, she tugged at the rope, which had the effect of swinging the boat's after-end across the canal, almost touching the opposite side and another cellar entrance, about thirty feet from the spot where John stood watching her. Then the child jumped again, landing on the cellar steps, and vanished into the house; the boat swinging back into mid-canal behind her. The whole episode couldn't have taken more than four minutes.

Then he heard the quick patter of feet. Laura had returned. She had seen none of it, for which he felt unspeakably thankful. The sight of a child, a little girl, in what must have been near danger, her fear that the scene he had just witnessed was in some way a sequel to the alarming cry, might have had a disastrous effect on her overwrought nerves. "What are you doing?" she said. "I daren't go on without you. The wretched alley branches in two directions."

"Sorry," he told her. "I'm coming."

He took her arm and they walked briskly along the alley, John with an apparent confidence he did not possess. "There were no more cries, were there?" she asked.

"No," he said, "no, nothing. It was some drunk."

The alley led to a deserted *campo* behind a church, not a church he knew, and he led the way across, along another street and over a farther bridge.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I think we take this right-hand turning. It will lead us into the Greek quarter—the church of San Giorgio is somewhere over there."

She did not answer. She was beginning to lose faith. The place was like a maze. They might circle round and round forever and then find themselves back again, near the bridge where they had heard the cry. Doggedly he led her on, and then surprisingly, with relief, he saw people walking in the lighted street ahead, there was a spire of a church, the surroundings became familiar.

"There, I told you," he said. "That's San Zaccaria, we've found it all right. Your restaurant can't be far away."

And anyway there would be other restaurants, somewhere to eat—at least here was the cheering glitter of lights, of movement, canals beside which people walked, the atmosphere of tourism. The word *Ristorante*, in blue lights, shone like a beacon down an alley.

"Is this your place?" he asked.

"God knows," she said. "Who cares? Let's feed there anyway."

And so into the sudden blast of heated air and hum of voices, the

smell of pasta, wine, waiters, jostling customers, laughter. "For two? This way, please." Why, John thought, was one's British nationality always so obvious? A cramped little table and an enormous menu scribbled in an indecipherable mauve biro, with the waiter hovering.

"Two very large camparis with soda," John said. "*Then* we'll study the menu."

He was not going to be rushed. He handed the bill of fare to Laura and looked about him. Mostly Italians—that meant the food would be good. Then he saw them, at the opposite side of the room. The twin sisters. They must have come into the restaurant hard upon Laura's and his own arrival, for they were only now sitting down, shedding their coats.

John was seized with the irrational thought that this was no coincidence. The sisters had noticed them both in the street outside and had followed them in. Why in the name of hell should they have picked on this particular spot in the whole of Venice unless Laura herself, at Torcello, had suggested a further encounter, or the sister had suggested it to her? A small restaurant near the church of San Zaccaria. It was Laura, before the walk, who had mentioned San Zaccaria.

She was still intent on the menu, she had not seen the sisters, but any moment now she would have chosen what she wanted to eat and then she would raise her head and look across the room. If only the drinks would come. If only the waiter would bring the drinks, it would give Laura something to do.

"You know, I was thinking," he said quickly, "we really ought to go to the garage tomorrow and get the car and do that drive to Padua. We could lunch in Padua, see the cathedral and touch St Anthony's tomb and look at the Giotto frescoes, then come back by way of those villas along the Brenta that the guidebook cracks up."

It was no use, though. She was looking across the restaurant and gave a little gasp of surprise. It was genuine. He could swear it was genuine.

"Look," she said, "how extraordinary! How really amazing!"

"What?" he said sharply.

"Why, there they are—my wonderful old twins. They've seen us, what's more. They're staring this way." She waved her hand, radiant, delighted. The sister she had spoken to at Torcello bowed and smiled. False old bitch, he thought. I know they followed us.

"Oh, darling, I must go and speak to them," she said impulsively, "just to tell them how happy I've been all day, thanks to them."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" he said. "Look, here are the drinks. And we haven't ordered yet. Surely you can wait until later, until we've eaten?"

"I won't be a moment," she said, "and, anyway, I want scampi—nothing first. I told you I wasn't hungry."

She got up and, brushing past the waiter with the drinks, crossed the room. She might have been greeting loved friends of years. John watched her bend over the table and shake them both by the hand, and because there was a vacant chair at their table she drew it up and sat down, talking and smiling. Nor did the sisters seem surprised—at least not the one she knew, who nodded and talked back, while the blind sister remained impassive.

All right, thought John savagely, then I *will* get sloshed, and he proceeded to down his campari and soda and order another, while he pointed out something quite unintelligible on the menu as his own choice, but remembered scampi for Laura. "And a bottle of Soave," he added.

The evening was ruined, anyway. What was to have been an intimate, happy celebration would now be heavy laden with spiritualistic visions, poor little dead Christine sharing the table with them, which was so damned stupid when in earthly life she would have been tucked up in bed hours ago. The bitter taste of the campari suited his mood of sudden self-pity, and all the while he watched the group at the table in the opposite corner, Laura apparently listening while the more active sister held forth and the blind one sat silent, her formidable sightless eyes turned in his direction.

She's phony, he thought, she's not blind at all. They're both of them frauds.

He began on his second campari and soda. The two drinks, taken on an empty stomach, had an instant effect. His vision became blurred. And still Laura went on sitting at the other table, putting in a question now and again while the active sister talked. The waiter appeared with the scampi and John's own order, which was totally unrecognizable, heaped with a livid sauce.

"The signora does not come?" inquired the first waiter, and John shook his head grimly, pointing an unsteady finger across the room.

"Tell the signora," he said carefully, "her scampi will get cold."

He stared down at the offering placed before him and prodded it delicately with a fork. The pallid sauce dissolved, revealing two enormous slices of what appeared to be boiled pork bedecked with garlic. He forked a portion to his mouth and chewed—and, yes, it

was pork, steamy, rich, the spicy sauce having turned it curiously sweet. He laid down his fork, pushing the plate away, and became aware of Laura returning across the room and sitting beside him. She did not say anything, which was just as well, he thought, because he was too near nausea to answer. It wasn't just the drink, but reaction from the whole nightmarish day.

Laura began to eat her scampi, not seeming to notice he was not eating. The waiter, hovering at his elbow, anxious, seemed aware that John's choice was somehow an error and discreetly removed the plate.

"Bring me a green salad," murmured John, and even then Laura did not register surprise or, as she might have done in more normal circumstances, accuse him of having had too much to drink. Finally, when she had finished her scampi and was sipping her wine, she began to speak.

"Darling," she said, "I know you won't believe it, and it's rather frightening in a way, but after they left the restaurant in Torcello, the sisters went to the cathedral, as we did, although we didn't see them in the crowd, and the blind one had another vision. She said Christine was trying to tell her something about us, that we will be in danger if we stay in Venice. Christine wants us to go away as soon as possible."

So that's it, he thought. They think they can run our lives for us. This is to be our problem from henceforth. Do we eat? Do we get up? Do we go to bed? We must get in touch with the twin sisters. They will direct us.

"Well?" she said. "Why don't you say something?"

"Because," he answered, "you are perfectly right, I don't believe it. Quite frankly, I judge your old sisters as being a couple of freaks. They're obviously unbalanced, and I'm sorry if this hurts you, but the fact is they've found a sucker in you."

"You're being unfair," said Laura. "They're genuine, I know it. They were completely sincere in what they said."

"All right, they're sincere. But that doesn't make them well balanced. Honestly, darling, you meet that old girl for ten minutes in a loo, she tells you she sees Christine sitting beside us—well, anyone with a gift for telepathy could read your unconscious mind in an instant. And then, pleased with her success, as any old psychic expert would be, she flings a further mood of ecstasy and wants to boot us out of Venice. Well, I'm sorry, but to hell with it."

The room was no longer reeling. Anger had sobered him. If it

wouldn't put Laura to shame, he'd get up and cross to their table and tell the old fools where they got off.

"I knew you'd take it like this," said Laura unhappily. "I told them you would. They said not to worry. As long as we leave Venice tomorrow everything will be all right."

"Oh, for God's sake," said John. He poured himself another glass of wine.

"After all," Laura went on, "we have really seen the cream of Venice. I don't mind going on somewhere else. And if we stayed—I know it sounds silly, but I'd have a nasty nagging feeling inside me, thinking of Christine being unhappy and trying to tell us to go."

"Right," said John with ominous calm, "that settles it. Go we will. I suggest we clear off to the hotel straightaway and warn the reception we're leaving in the morning. Have you had enough to eat?"

"Oh, dear," sighed Laura, "don't take it like that. Look, why not come over and meet them, and then they can explain about the vision to you? Perhaps you'd take it seriously then. Especially as you're the one it most concerns. Christine is more worried over you than me. And the extraordinary thing is that the blind sister says you're psychic and don't know it. You are somehow *en rapport* with the unknown and I'm not."

"Well, that's final," said John. "I'm psychic, am I? Fine. My psychic intuition tells me to get out of this restaurant now, at once, and we can decide what we do about leaving Venice when we're back at the hotel."

He signaled to the waiter for the bill and they waited for it, not speaking to each other, Laura unhappy, fiddling with her bag, while John, glancing furtively at the twins' table, noticed that they were tucking into plates piled high with spaghetti, in very unpsychic fashion.

The bill disposed of, John pushed back his chair. "Right. Are you ready?" he asked.

"I'm going to say goodbye to them first," said Laura, her mouth set sulkily, reminding him instantly, with a pang, of their poor lost child.

"Just as you like," he replied, and walked ahead of her out of the restaurant without a backward glance.

The soft humidity of the evening, so pleasant to walk about in earlier, had turned to rain. The strolling tourists had melted away. One or two people hurried by under umbrellas. This is what the inhabitants who live here see, he thought. This is the true life.

Empty streets by night, and the dank stillness of a stagnant canal beneath shuttered houses. The rest is a bright facade put on for show, glittering by sunlight.

Laura joined him and they walked away together in silence—and, emerging presently behind the ducal palace, came out into the Piazza San Marco. The rain was heavy now, and they sought shelter with the few remaining stragglers under the colonnades. The orchestras had packed up for the evening. The tables were bare, chairs turned upside down.

The experts are right, John thought. Venice is sinking. The whole city is slowly dying. One day the tourists will travel here by boat to peer down into the waters and they will see pillars, columns, and marble far, far beneath them, slime and mud uncovering for brief moments a lost underworld of stone.

Their heels made a ringing sound on the pavement and the rain splashed from the gutterings above. A fine ending to an evening that had started with brave hope, with innocence.

When they came to their hotel, Laura made straight for the lift and John turned to the desk to ask the night porter for the key. The man handed him a telegram.

John stared at it a moment. Laura was already in the lift. Then he opened the envelope and read the message. It was from the headmaster of Johnnie's preparatory school.

JOHNNIE UNDER OBSERVATION SUSPECTED APPENDICITIS
IN CITY HOSPITAL HERE. NO CAUSE FOR ALARM BUT
SURGEON THOUGHT WISE TO ADVISE YOU. CHARLES HILL.

John read the message twice, then walked slowly toward the lift where Laura was waiting for him. He gave her the telegram. "This came when we were out," he said. "Not awfully good news." He pressed the lift button as she read the telegram. The lift stopped at the second floor and they got out.

"Well, this decides it, doesn't it?" she said. "Here's the proof. We have to leave Venice because we're going home. It's Johnnie who's in danger, not us. This is what Christine was trying to tell the twins."

The first thing John did the following morning was to put a call through to the headmaster at the preparatory school. Then he gave notice of their departure to the reception manager, and they packed while they waited for the call. Neither of them referred to the events of the preceding day. John knew the arrival of the telegram and the

foreboding of danger from the sisters was coincidence, nothing more, but it was pointless to start an argument about it. Laura was convinced otherwise, but intuitively she knew it was best to keep her feelings to herself.

During breakfast, they discussed ways and means of getting home. Since it was early in the season, it should be possible to get themselves and the car onto the special car train that ran from Milan through to Calais. In any event, the headmaster had said there was no urgency.

The call from England came while John was in the bathroom. Laura answered it. He came into the bedroom a few minutes later. She was still speaking, but he could tell from the expression in her eyes that she was anxious.

"It's Mrs. Hill," she said. "Mr. Hill is in class. She says they reported from the hospital that Johnnie had a restless night and the surgeon may have to operate, but he doesn't want to unless it's absolutely necessary. They've taken X-rays and the appendix is in a tricky position."

"Here, give it to me," he said.

The soothing but slightly guarded voice of the headmaster's wife came down the receiver. "I'm so sorry this may spoil your plans," she said, "but both Charles and I felt you ought to be told, and that you might feel easier if you were on the spot. Johnnie is very plucky, but of course he has some fever. That isn't unusual, the surgeon says, in the circumstances. Sometimes an appendix can get displaced, it appears, and this makes it more complicated. He's going to decide about operating this evening."

"Yes, of course, we quite understand," said John, and then broke off because Laura was making gestures beside him.

"If we can't get the car on the train, I can fly," she said. "They're sure to be able to find me a seat on a plane. Then at least one of us would be there this evening."

He nodded agreement. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Hill, we'll manage to get back all right. Yes, I'm sure Johnnie is in good hands. Thank your husband for us. Goodbye." He replaced the receiver and looked around him at the tumbled beds, suitcases on the floor, maps, books, coats, everything they had brought with them in the car. "Oh, God," he said, "what a bloody mess. All this junk." The telephone rang again. It was the hall porter to say he had succeeded in booking a sleeper for them both, and a place for the car, on the following night.

"Look," said Laura, who had seized the telephone, "could you book one seat on the midday plane from Venice to London today for me? It's imperative one of us gets home this evening. My husband could follow with the car tomorrow."

"Here, hang on," interrupted John. "No need for panic stations. Surely twenty-four hours wouldn't make all that difference?"

Anxiety had drained the color from her face. She turned to him, distraught. "It mightn't to you, but it does to me," she said. "I've lost one child, I'm not going to lose another."

"All right, darling, all right." He put his hand out to her, but she brushed it off impatiently and continued giving directions to the porter. John turned back to his packing. No use saying anything. Better for it to be as she wished. They could, of course, both go by air, and then when all was well, and Johnnie better, he could come back and fetch the car, driving home through France as they had come. Rather a sweat, though, and the hell of an expense.

"We could, if you like, both fly," he began tentatively, explaining the sudden idea, but she would have none of it. "That really *would* be absurd," she said impatiently. "As long as I'm there this evening, and you follow by train, it's all that matters. Besides, we'll need the car, going back and forth to the hospital. And our luggage—we couldn't go off and just leave all this here."

No, he saw her point. A silly idea. It was only—well, he was as worried about Johnnie as she was, though he wasn't going to say so.

"I'm going downstairs to stand over the porter," said Laura. "They always make more effort if you're actually on the spot. Everything I want tonight is packed. I'll only need my overnight case. You can bring everything else in the car."

She hadn't been out of the bedroom five minutes before the telephone rang. "Darling," Laura said, "it couldn't have worked out better. The porter has got me on a charter flight that leaves Venice in less than an hour. A special motor-launch takes the party direct from San Marco in about ten minutes. Some passenger on the charter flight cancelled. I'll be at Gatwick in less than four hours."

"I'll be down right away," he told her.

He joined her by the reception desk. She no longer looked anxious and drawn, but full of purpose. She was on her way. He kept wishing they were going together. He couldn't bear to stay on in Venice after she had gone, but the thought of driving to Milan, spending a dreary

night in a hotel there alone, the endless dragging day which would follow, and the long hours in the train the next night filled him with intolerable depression, quite apart from the anxiety about Johnnie. They walked to the San Marco landing-stage, the Molo bright and glittering after the rain, a little breeze blowing, the postcards and scarves and tourist souvenirs fluttering on the stalls, the tourists themselves out in force, strolling, contented, the happy day before them.

"I'll ring you tonight from Milan," he told her. "The Hills will give you a bed, I suppose. And if you're at the hospital they'll let me have the latest news. That must be your charter party. You're welcome to them."

The passengers descending from the landing-stage down into the waiting launch were carrying hand-luggage with Union Jack tags on them. They were mostly middle-aged, with what appeared to be two Methodist ministers in charge. One of them advanced toward Laura, holding out his hand, showing a gleaming row of dentures when he smiled. "You must be the lady joining us for the homeward flight," he said. "Welcome aboard, and to the Union of Fellowship. We're all delighted to make your acquaintance. Sorry, we hadn't a seat for hubby, too."

Laura turned swiftly and kissed John, a tremor at the corner of her mouth betraying inward laughter. "Take care of yourself, hubby," she whispered. "Call me tonight."

The pilot sounded a curious little toot upon his horn, and in a moment Laura had climbed down the steps into the launch and was standing with the other passengers, waving her hand, her scarlet coat a gay patch of color amongst the more sober suiting of her companions. The launch tooted again and moved away from the land-stage, and John stood there watching it, a sense of immense loss filling his heart. Then he turned and walked away, back to the hotel, the bright day all about him desolate, unseen.

There was nothing, he thought, as he looked about him back in the hotel bedroom, so melancholy as a vacated room, especially when the recent signs of occupation were still visible. Laura's suitcases on the bed, a second coat she had left behind. Traces of powder on the dressing table. A tissue with a lipstick smear in the wastepaper basket. Even a toothpaste tube, squeezed dry, lying on the glass shelf above the wash-basin. Sounds of the heedless traffic on the Grand Canal came as always from the open window, but Laura was

no longer there to listen to it, or to watch from the small balcony. The pleasure had gone. Feeling had gone.

John finished packing and, leaving all the baggage ready to be collected, he went downstairs to pay the bill. The reception clerk was welcoming new arrivals. People were sitting on the terrace overlooking the Grand Canal reading newspapers, the pleasant day waiting to be planned.

He decided to have an early lunch here on the hotel terrace—familiar ground—and then have the porter carry the baggage to one of the ferries that steamed between San Marco and the Porta Roma, where the car was garaged. The fiasco meal of the night before had left him empty, and he was ready for the trolley of hors d'œuvres when they brought it to him. Even here, though, there was change. The headwaiter, their special friend, was off duty, and the table where they usually sat was occupied by new arrivals—a honeymoon couple, he told himself sourly, observing the gaiety, the smiles, while he had been shown to a small single table behind a tub of flowers.

She's airborne now, John thought, she's on her way, and he tried to picture Laura seated between the clergymen, telling them, no doubt, about Johnnie ill in hospital, and heaven knew what else besides. Well, the twin sisters could rest in psychic peace, anyway. Their wishes would have been fulfilled.

Lunch over, there was no point in lingering with a cup of coffee on the terrace. His desire was to get away as soon as possible, fetch the car, and be en route for Milan. He made his farewells at the reception desk, and, escorted by a porter who had piled his baggage onto a wheeled trolley, made his way once more to the landing-stage of San Marco.

As John stepped onto the steam-ferry, the luggage heaped beside him, a crowd of jostling people all about him, he had one momentary pang to be leaving Venice. When, if ever, he wondered, would they come again? Next year? In three years? Glimpsed first on their honeymoon nearly ten years ago, and then a second visit, *en passant*, before a cruise, and now this last abortive ten days that had ended so abruptly.

The water glittered in the sunshine, buildings shone, tourists in dark glasses paraded up and down the rapidly receding Molo, already the terrace of their hotel was out of sight as the ferry churned its way up the Grand Canal. So many impressions to seize and hold—familiar loved facades, balconies, windows, water lapping the cellar steps of decaying palaces, the little red house where d'Annunzio

lived, with its garden ("our house," Laura called it, pretending it was theirs)—and too soon the ferry would be turning left on the direct route to the Piazzale Roma, thus missing the best of the Canal, the Rialto, the farther palaces.

Another ferry was heading downstream to pass them, filled with passengers, and for a brief foolish moment he wished he could change places, be amongst the happy tourists bound for Venice and all he had left behind him. Then he saw her. Laura, in her scarlet coat, the twin sisters by her side, the active sister with her hand on Laura's arm, talking earnestly, and Laura herself, her hair blowing in the wind, gesticulating, on her face a look of distress. He stared, astounded, too astonished to shout, to wave, and anyway they would never have heard or seen him, for his own ferry had already passed and was heading in the opposite direction.

What the hell had happened? There must have been a holdup with the charter flight and it had never taken off, but in that case why hadn't Laura telephoned him at the hotel? And what were those damned sisters doing? Had she run into them at the airport? Was it coincidence? And why did she look so anxious? He could think of no explanation. Perhaps the flight had been canceled. Laura, of course, would go straight to the hotel, expecting to find him there, intending, doubtless, to drive with him to Milan after all and take the train the following night. What a blasted mixup. The only thing to do was telephone the hotel when his ferry reached the Piazzale Roma and tell her to wait—he would return and fetch her. As for the damned interfering sisters, they could get stuffed.

The usual stampede ensued when the ferry arrived at the landing-stage. He had to find a porter to collect his baggage and wait while he discovered a telephone. The fiddling with change, the hunt for the number, delayed him still more. He succeeded at last in getting through, and luckily the reception clerk he knew was still at the desk.

"Look, there's been some frightful muddle," he began, and explained how Laura was even now on her way back to the hotel—he had seen her with two friends on one of the ferry-services. Would the reception clerk explain and tell her to wait? He would be back by the next available service to collect her. "In any event, detain her," he said. "I'll be as quick as I can." The reception clerk understood perfectly, and John rang off.

The porter was still waiting with the baggage, and it seemed simplest to walk with him to the garage, hand everything over to

the chap in charge of the office there, and ask him to keep it for an hour, when he would be returning with his wife to pick up the car. Then he went back to the landing-station to await the next ferry to Venice.

The minutes dragged, and he kept wondering all the time what had gone wrong at the airport and why Laura hadn't telephoned. No use conjecturing. She would tell him the whole story at the hotel. One thing was certain: he would not allow Laura and himself to be saddled with the sisters and become involved with their affairs. He could imagine Laura saying that they also had missed a flight and could they have a lift to Milan?

Finally the ferry chugged alongside the landing-stage and he stepped aboard. What an anti-climax, thrashing back past the familiar sights to which he had bidden a nostalgic farewell such a short while ago. He didn't even look about him this time, he was so intent on reaching his destination.

In San Marco, there were more people than ever, the afternoon crowds walking shoulder to shoulder, every one of them on pleasure bent. At the hotel, he pushed his way through the swing door, expecting to see Laura, and possibly the sisters, waiting in the lounge to the left of the entrance. She wasn't there. He went to the desk. The reception clerk he had spoken to on the telephone was talking to the manager.

"Has my wife arrived?" John asked.

"No, sir, not yet."

"What an extraordinary thing. Are you sure?"

"Absolutely certain, sir. I've been here ever since you telephoned me at a quarter to two. I have not left the desk."

"I just don't understand it. She was on one of the vaporetto's passing by the Accademia. She would have landed at San Marco about five minutes later and come on here."

The clerk seemed nonplused. "I don't know what to say. The signora was with friends, did you say?"

"Yes. Well, acquaintances. Two ladies we met at Torcello yesterday. I was astonished to see her with them on the vaporetto, and of course I assumed that the flight had been cancelled and she had somehow met up with them at the airport and decided to return here with them, to catch me before I left."

Oh, hell, what was Laura doing? It was after three. It was only a matter of moments from the San Marco landing-stage to the hotel.

"Perhaps the signora went with her friends to their hotel instead. Do you know where they are staying?"

"No," said John, "I haven't the slightest idea. What's more, I don't even know the names of the two ladies. They were sisters—twins, in fact. They look exactly alike. But why would she go to their hotel and not here?"

The swing-door opened, but it wasn't Laura. Two people staying in the hotel.

The manager said, "I tell you what I will do. I will telephone the airport and check about the flight. Then, at least, we will get somewhere." He smiled apologetically. It was not usual for arrangements to go wrong.

"Yes, do that," said John. "We may as well know what happened there."

He lit a cigarette and began to pace up and down the entrance hall. What a bloody mixup. And how unlike Laura, who knew he would be setting off for Milan directly after lunch—indeed, for all she knew he might have gone before. But surely, in that case, she would have telephoned at once, on arrival at the airport, had the flight been canceled. The manager was ages telephoning, he had to be put through on some other line, and his Italian was too rapid for John to follow the conversation. Finally he replaced the receiver.

"It is more mysterious than ever, sir," he said. "The charter flight was not delayed—it took off on schedule with a full complement of passengers. As far as they could tell me, there was no hitch. The signora must simply have changed her mind." His smile was more apologetic than ever.

"Changed her mind," John repeated. "But why on earth should she do that? She was so anxious to be home tonight."

The manager shrugged. "You know how ladies can be, sir," he said. "Your wife may have thought that after all she would prefer to take the train to Milan with you. I do assure you, though, that the charter party was most respectable, and it was a Caravelle aircraft, perfectly safe."

"Yes, yes," said John impatiently, "I don't blame your arrangements in the slightest. I just can't understand what induced her to change her mind, unless it was meeting with these two ladies."

The manager was silent. He couldn't think of anything to say. "Is it possible," the reception clerk ventured, "that you made a mistake and it was not the signora you saw on the vaporetto?"

"Oh, no," replied John, "it was my wife, I assure you. She was

wearing her red coat and she was hatless, just as she left here. I saw her as plainly as I can see you. I would swear to it in a court of law."

"It is unfortunate," said the manager, "that we do not know the name of the two ladies, or the hotel where they were staying. You say you met these ladies at Torcello yesterday?"

"Yes—but only briefly. They weren't staying there. We saw them at dinner in Venice later, as it happens."

"Excuse me—" Guests were arriving with luggage to check in and the clerk was obliged to attend to them. John turned in desperation to the manager.

"Do you think it would be any good telephoning the hotel in Torcello in case the people there knew the name of the ladies, or where they were staying in Venice?"

"We can try," replied the manager. "It is a small hope, but we can try."

John resumed his anxious pacing, all the while watching the swing-door, hoping, praying, that he would catch sight of the red coat and Laura would enter. Once again there followed what seemed an interminable telephone conversation between the manager and someone at the hotel in Torcello.

"Tell them two sisters," said John, "two elderly ladies dressed in grey, both exactly alike. One lady was blind," he added. The manager nodded. He was obviously giving a detailed description. Yet when he hung up, he shook his head. "The manager at Torcello says he remembers the two ladies well," he told John, "but they were only there for lunch. He never learned their names."

"Well, that's that. There's nothing to do now but wait."

John lit his third cigarette and went out onto the terrace, to resume his pacing there. He stared out across the canal, searching the heads of the people on passing steamers, motor-boats, even drifting gondolas. The minutes ticked by on his watch and there was no sign of Laura. A terrible foreboding nagged at him that somehow this was prearranged, that Laura had never intended to catch the aircraft, that last night in the restaurant she had made an assignation with the sisters. Oh, God, he thought, that's impossible, I'm going paranoiac. Yet why, why? No, more likely the encounter at the airport was fortuitous, and for some incredible reason they had persuaded Laura not to board the aircraft, even prevented her from doing so, trotting out one of their psychic visions, that the aircraft would crash, that she must return with them to Venice. And Laura,

in her sensitive state, felt they must be right, swallowed it all without question.

But granted, all these possibilities, why had she not come to the hotel? What was she doing? Four o'clock, half past four, the sun no longer dappling the water. He went back to the reception desk.

"I just can't hang around," he said. "Even if she does turn up, we'll never make Milan this evening. I might see her walking with these ladies in the Piazza San Marco or somewhere. If she arrives while I'm out, will you explain?"

The clerk was full of concern. "Indeed, yes," he said. "It is very worrying for you, sir. Would it perhaps be prudent if we booked you in here tonight?"

John gestured helplessly. "Perhaps—yes. I don't know, maybe."

He went out through the swing-door and began to walk toward the Piazza San Marco. He looked into every shop up and down the colonnades, crossed the piazza a dozen times, threaded his way between the tables in front of Florian's, in front of Quadri's, knowing that Laura's red coat and the distinctive appearance of the twin sisters could easily be spotted, even amongst this milling crowd; but there was no sign of them. He joined the crowd of shoppers in the Merceria, shoulder to shoulder with idlers, thrusters, and window-gazers, knowing instinctively that it was useless, they wouldn't be here. Why should Laura have deliberately missed her flight to return to Venice for such a purpose? And even if she had done so, for some reason beyond his imagining, she would surely have come first to the hotel to find him.

The only thing left to him was to try to track down the sisters. Their hotel could be anywhere amongst the hundreds of hotels and pensions scattered through Venice, or even across the other side at the Zattere, or farther again on the Giudecca. These last possibilities seemed remote. More likely they were staying in a small hotel or pension somewhere near San Zaccaria handy to the restaurant where they had dined last night. The blind one would surely not go far afield in the evening. He had been a fool not to have thought of this before, and he turned back and walked quickly away from the brightly lighted shopping district toward the narrower, more cramped quarter where they had dined last evening.

He found the restaurant without difficulty, but they weren't yet open for dinner and the waiter preparing tables was not the one who had served them. John asked to see the *padrone*, and the waiter disappeared to the back regions, returning after a moment or two

with the somewhat disheveled-looking proprietor in shirtsleeves, caught in a slack moment.

"I had dinner here last night," John explained. "There were two ladies sitting at that table there in the corner." He pointed to it.

"You wish to book that table for this evening?" asked the proprietor.

"No," said John. "No, there were two ladies there last night, two sisters, *due sorelle*, twins, *gemelle*"—what was the right word for twins? "Do you remember? Two ladies, *sorelle vecchie*—"

"Ah," said the man, "*si, si, signore, la povera signorina*." He put his hands to his eyes to feign blindness. "Yes, I remember."

"Do you know their names?" asked John. "Where they were staying? I am very anxious to trace them."

The proprietor spread out his hands in a gesture of regret. "I am very sorry, signore, I do not know the names of the signorine—they have been here only once, twice perhaps, for dinner, they do not say where they were staying. Perhaps if you come again tonight they might be here? Would you like to book a table?" He pointed around him, suggesting a whole choice of tables that might appeal to a prospective diner, but John shook his head.

"Thank you, no. I may be dining elsewhere. I am sorry to have troubled you. If the signorine *should* come—" He paused. "Possibly I may return later," he added. "I'm not sure."

The proprietor bowed, and walked with him to the entrance. "In Venice the whole world meets," he said, smiling. "It is possible the signore will find his friends tonight. *Arrivederci, signore*."

Friends? John walked out into the street. More likely kidnapers. Anxiety had turned to fear, to panic. Something had gone terribly wrong. Those women had got hold of Laura, played upon her suggestibility, induced her to go with them, either to their hotel or elsewhere. Should he find the consulate? Where was it? What would he say when he got there? He began walking without purpose, finding himself, as they had done the night before, in streets he did not know—and suddenly came upon a tall building with the word *Questura* on it.

This is it, he thought. I don't care, something has happened. I'm going inside.

There were a number of police in uniform coming and going—the place, at any rate, was active—and, addressing himself to one of them behind a glass partition, he asked if there was anyone who spoke English. The man pointed to a flight of stairs and John went

up, entering a door on the right, where he saw that a couple were sitting waiting, and with relief he recognized them as fellow countrymen, tourists, in some sort of predicament.

"Come and sit down," said the man. "We've waited half an hour, but they can't be much longer. What a country! They wouldn't leave us like this at home."

John took the proffered cigarette and found a chair beside them. "What's your trouble?" he asked.

"My wife had her handbag pinched in one of those shops in the Merceria," said the man. "She simply put it down one moment to look at something and, you'd hardly credit it, the next moment it had gone. I say it was a sneak thief, she insists it was the girl behind the counter, but who's to say? Anyway, I'm certain we won't get it back. What have you lost?"

"Suitcase stolen," John lied rapidly. "It had some important papers in it."

How could he say he had lost his wife? He couldn't even begin.

The man nodded in sympathy. "The trouble is, they're not going to bother with our troubles much, not with this murderer at large. They're all out looking for him."

"Murderer? What murderer?" asked John.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard about it?" The man stared at him in surprise. "Venice has talked of nothing else. It's been in all the papers, on the radio, and even in the English papers. A grisly business. One woman was found with her throat slit last week—a tourist—and some old chap was discovered with the same sort of knife wound this morning. They seem to think it must be a maniac because there doesn't seem to be any motive. Nasty thing to happen in Venice in the tourist season."

"My wife and I never bother with the newspapers when we're on holiday," said John. "And we're neither of us much given to gossip at the hotel."

"Very wise of you," laughed the man. "It might have spoiled your holiday, especially if your wife is nervous. Well, we're off tomorrow, anyway." He turned to his wife. "Can't say we mind, do we, dear? Venice has gone downhill since we were here last. And this loss of the handbag really is the limit."

The door of the inner room opened and a senior police officer asked the man and his wife to pass through.

"I bet we don't get any satisfaction," murmured the tourist, wink-

ing at John, and he and his wife went into the inner room. The door closed behind them.

John stubbed out his cigarette and lighted another. A strange feeling of unreality possessed him. He asked himself what he was doing here, what was the use of it? Laura was no longer in Venice but had disappeared, perhaps forever, with those diabolical sisters. She would never be traced. And just as the two of them had made up a fantastic story about the twins when they first spotted them in Torcello, so, with nightmare logic, the fiction would have basis in fact—the women were in reality disguised crooks, men with criminal intent who lured unsuspecting persons to some appalling fate. They might even be the murderers for whom the police sought. Who would ever suspect two elderly women of respectable appearance, living quietly in some second-rate pension or hotel? He stubbed out his cigarette, unfinished.

This, he thought, really is the start of paranoia. This is the way people go off their heads. He glanced at his watch. It was half past six. Better pack this in and keep to the single link of sanity remaining. Return to the hotel, put a call through to the prep school in England, and get the latest news of Johnnie. He hadn't thought about poor Johnnie since sighting Laura on the vaporetto. He stood to leave.

Too late, though. The inner door opened, the couple were ushered out.

"Usual claptrap," said the husband sotto voce to John. "They'll do what they can. Not much hope. So many foreigners in Venice, all of 'em thieves. The locals all above reproach, wouldn't pay 'em to steal from customers. Well, I wish you better luck."

He nodded, his wife smiled, and they were gone. John followed the police officer into the inner room.

Formalities began. Name, address, passport. Length of stay in Venice, etc. Then the questions, and John, the sweat beginning to appear on his forehead, launched into his interminable story. The first encounter with the sisters, the meeting at the restaurant, Laura's state of suggestibility because of the death of their child, the telegram about Johnnie, the decision to take the chartered flight, her departure, and her sudden inexplicable return. When he had finished, he felt as exhausted as if he had driven three hundred miles nonstop after a severe bout of flu.

His interrogator spoke excellent English with a strong Italian accent. "You say," he began, "that your wife was suffering the af-

tereffects of shock. This has been noticeable during your stay here in Venice?"

"Well, yes," John replied. "She had really been quite ill. The holiday didn't seem to be doing her much good. It was only when she met these two women at Torcello yesterday that her mood changed. The strain seemed to go. She was ready, I suppose, to snatch at every straw, and this belief that our little girl was watching over her had somehow restored her to what appeared normality."

"It would be natural," said the police officer, "in the circumstances. But no doubt the telegram last night was a further shock to you both?"

"Yes. That was the reason we decided to return home."

"No argument between you? No difference of opinion?"

"None. We were in complete agreement. My one regret was that I couldn't go with my wife on this charter flight."

The police officer nodded. "It could well be that your wife had a sudden attack of amnesia, and meeting the two ladies served as a link—she clung to them for support. You have described them with great accuracy, and I think they should not be too difficult to trace. Meanwhile, I suggest you should return to your hotel and we will get in touch with you as soon as we have news."

At least, John thought, they believed his story. They didn't consider him a crank who had made the whole thing up and was merely wasting their time. "You appreciate," he said, "that I'm extremely anxious. These women may have some criminal design on my wife. One has heard of such things."

The police officer smiled for the first time. "Please don't concern yourself," he said. "I am sure there will be some satisfactory explanation."

All very well, thought John, but in heaven's name what?

"I'm sorry," he said, "to have taken up so much of your time. Especially as I gather the police have their hands full hunting down a murderer who is still at large."

He spoke deliberately. No harm in letting the fellow know that for all any of them could tell there might be some connection between Laura's disappearance and this other hideous affair.

"Ah, that," said the police officer, rising to his feet. "We hope to have the murderer under lock and key very soon."

His tone of confidence was reassuring. Murderers, missing wives, lost handbags were all under control. They shook hands and John was ushered out of the door and so downstairs . . .

Perhaps, he thought, as he walked slowly back to the hotel, the fellow was right. Laura had suffered a sudden attack of amnesia, and the sisters happened to be at the airport and had brought her back to Venice, to their own hotel, because Laura couldn't remember where she and John had been staying. Perhaps they were even now trying to track down his hotel. Anyway, he could do nothing more. The police had everything in hand and, please God, would come up with the solution. All he wanted to do right now was collapse on a bed with a stiff whisky and put through a call to Johnnie's school.

The page took him up in the lift to a modest room on the fourth floor at the rear of the hotel—bare, impersonal, the shutters closed, with a smell of cooking wafting up from a courtyard below.

"Ask them to send me up a double whisky, will you?" John said to the boy. "And a ginger ale."

When he was alone, he plunged his face under the cold tap in the wash-basin, relieved to find that the minute portion of visitor's soap afforded some measure of comfort. He flung off his shoes, hung his coat over the back of a chair, and threw himself down on the bed. Somebody's radio was blasting forth an old popular song, now several seasons out of date, that had been one of Laura's favorites. "I love you, Baby—" He reached for the telephone and asked the exchange to put through the call to England. Then he closed his eyes while the insistent voice persisted, "I love you, Baby—I can't get you out of my mind."

Presently there was a tap at the door. It was the waiter with his drink. Too little ice and such meager comfort, but what desperate need. He gulped it down without the ginger ale, and in a few moments the ever-nagging pain was eased, numbed, bringing, if only momentarily, a sense of calm. The telephone rang. And now, he thought, bracing himself for ultimate disaster, the final shock—Johnnie probably dying, or already dead. In which case, nothing remained. Let Venice be engulfed.

The exchange told him that the connection had been made, and in a moment he heard the voice of Mrs. Hill at the other end of the line. They must have warned her that the call came from Venice, for she knew instantly who was speaking.

"Hullo?" she said. "Oh, I am so glad you rang! All is well. Johnnie has had his operation—the surgeon decided to do it at midday rather than wait—and it was completely successful. Your boy is going to be all right. So you don't have to worry any more and will have a peaceful night."

"Thank God," he answered.

"I know," she said, "we are all so relieved. Now I'll get off the line and you can speak to your wife."

John sat up on the bed, stunned. What the hell did she mean? Then he heard Laura's voice, cool and clear.

"Darling? Darling, are you there?"

He couldn't answer. He felt the hand holding the receiver go clammy cold with sweat. "I'm here," he whispered.

"It's not a very good line," she said, "but never mind. As Mrs. Hill told you, all is well. Such a nice surgeon, and a very sweet Sister on Johnnie's floor. I'm very happy about the way it's turned out. I came straight here after landing at Gatwick. The flight was okay, but such a funny crowd—it'll make you hysterical when I tell you about them. When I got to the hospital, Johnnie was coming around. Very dopey, of course, but so pleased to see me. And the Hills are being wonderful. I've got their spare room, and it's only a short taxi drive into the town and the hospital. I'll go to bed as soon as we've had dinner, because I'm a bit fagged what with the flight and the anxiety. How was the drive to Milan? Where are you staying?"

John didn't recognize the voice that answered as his own. It was the automatic response of some computer. "I'm not in Milan," he said. "I'm still in Venice."

"Still in Venice? What on earth for? Wouldn't the car start?"

"I can't explain," he said. "There was a stupid sort of mixup." He felt suddenly so exhausted that he nearly dropped the receiver, and, shame upon shame, he could feel tears pricking behind his eyes.

"What sort of mixup?" Her voice was suspicious, almost hostile. "You weren't in a crash?"

"No—nothing like that."

A moment's silence, and then she said, "Your voice sounds very slurred. Don't tell me you went and got pissed."

Oh, Christ—if she only knew! He was probably going to pass out any moment, but not from the whisky.

"I thought," he said slowly, "I thought I saw you, in a vaporetto, with those two sisters."

What was the point of going on? It was hopeless trying to explain.

"How could you have seen me with the sisters?" she said. "You knew I'd gone to the airport. Really, darling, you are an idiot. You seem to have got those two poor old dears on the brain. I hope you didn't say anything to Mrs. Hill just now."

"No."

"Well, what are you going to do? You'll catch the train at Milan tomorrow, won't you?"

"Yes, of course," he told her.

"I still don't understand what kept you in Venice," she said. "It all sounds a bit odd to me. However, thank God Johnnie is going to be all right and I'm here."

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

He could hear the distant sound of a gong from the headmaster's hall.

"You'd better go," he said. "My regards to the Hills, and my love to Johnnie."

"Yes. Take care of yourself, darling, and for goodness' sake don't miss the train tomorrow. And drive carefully."

The telephone clicked and she was gone. John poured the remaining drop of whisky into his empty glass and, sousing it with ginger ale, drank it down at a gulp. He got up and, crossing the room, threw open the shutters and leaned out of the window. He felt light-headed. His sense of relief, enormous, overwhelming, was somehow tempered with a curious feeling of unreality, almost as though the voice speaking from England had not been Laura's, after all, but a fake, and she was still in Venice, hidden in some furtive pension with the two sisters.

The point was, he *had* seen all three of them on the vaporetto. It was not another woman in a red coat. The women *had* been there with Laura. So what was the explanation? That he was going off his head? Or something more sinister? The sisters, possessing psychic powers of formidable strength, had seen him as their two ferries had passed, and in some inexplicable fashion had made him believe Laura was with them. But why, and to what end? No, it didn't make sense. The only explanation was that he had been mistaken, the whole episode an hallucination. In which case he needed psychoanalysis, just as Johnnie had needed a surgeon.

And what did he do now? Go downstairs and tell the management he had been at fault and had just spoken to his wife, who had arrived in England safe and sound from her charter-flight? He put on his shoes and ran his fingers through his hair. He glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to eight. If he nipped into the bar and had a quick drink, it would be easier to face the manager and admit what had happened. Then, perhaps, they would get in touch with the police. Profuse apologies all round for putting everyone to enormous trouble.

He made his way to the ground floor and went straight to the bar, feeling self-conscious, a marked man, half imagining everyone would look at him, thinking, There's the fellow with the missing wife. Luckily the bar was full and there wasn't a face he knew. Even the chap behind the bar was an underling who hadn't served him before. He downed his whisky and glanced over his shoulder to the reception hall. The desk was momentarily empty. He could see the manager's back framed in the doorway of an inner room, talking to someone within. On impulse, cowardlike, he crossed the hall and passed through the swing-door to the street outside.

I'll have some dinner, he decided, and then go back and face them. I'll feel more like it once I've some food inside me.

He went to a restaurant nearby where he and Laura had dined once or twice. Nothing mattered any more, because she was safe. The nightmare lay behind him. He could enjoy his dinner, despite her absence, and think of her sitting down with the Hills to a dull, quiet evening, early to bed, and on the following morning going to the hospital to sit with Johnnie. Johnnie was safe, too. No more worries, only the awkward explanations and apologies to the manager at the hotel.

There was a pleasant anonymity in sitting down at a corner table alone in the little restaurant, ordering vitello alla Marsala and half a bottle of Merlot. He took his time, enjoying his food but eating in a kind of haze, a sense of unreality still with him, while the conversation of his nearest neighbors had the same soothing effect as background music. When they rose and left, he saw by the clock on the wall that it was nearly half past nine. No use delaying matters any further. He drank his coffee, lighted a cigarette, and paid his bill. After all, he thought, as he walked back to the hotel, the manager would be greatly relieved to know that all was well.

When he pushed through the swing-door, the first thing he noticed was a man in police uniform talking to the manager at the desk. The reception clerk was there, too. They turned as John approached and the manager's face lit up with relief.

"Eccolo!" he exclaimed. "I was certain the signore would not be far away. Things are moving, signore. The two ladies have been traced, and they very kindly agreed to accompany the police to the Questura. If you will go there at once, this *agente di polizia* will escort you."

John flushed. "I have given everyone a lot of trouble," he said.

"I meant to tell you before going out to dinner, but you weren't at the desk. The fact is that I have contacted my wife. She did make the flight to London, after all, and I spoke to her on the telephone. It was all a great mistake."

The manager looked bewildered. "The signora is in London?" he repeated. He broke off, and exchanged a rapid conversation in Italian with the policeman. "It seems that the ladies maintain they did not go out for the day, except for a little shopping in the morning." He turned back to John. "Then who was it the signore saw on the vaporetto?"

John shook his head. "A very extraordinary mistake on my part, which I still don't understand," he said. "Obviously I did not see either my wife or the two ladies. I really am extremely sorry."

More rapid conversation in Italian. John noticed the clerk watching him with a curious expression in his eyes. The manager was obviously apologizing on John's behalf to the policeman, who looked annoyed and gave tongue to this effect, his voice increasing in volume, to the manager's concern. The whole business had undoubtedly given enormous trouble to a great many people, not least the two unfortunate sisters.

"Look," said John, interrupting the flow, "will you tell the *agente* I will go with him to headquarters and apologize in person to the police officer and to the ladies?"

The manager looked relieved. "If the signore would take the trouble," he said. "Naturally, the ladies were much distressed when a policeman interrogated them at their hotel, and they offered to accompany him to the Questura only because they were so distressed about the signora."

John felt more and more uncomfortable. Laura must never learn any of this. She would be outraged. He wondered if there was some penalty for giving the police misleading information involving a third party. His error began, in retrospect, to take on criminal proportions.

He crossed the Piazza San Marco, now thronged with after-dinner strollers and spectators at the cafes, all three orchestras going full blast in harmonious rivalry, while his companion kept a discreet two paces to his left and never uttered a word.

They arrived at the police station and mounted the stairs to the same inner room where he had been before. He saw immediately that it was not the officer he knew but another who sat behind the

desk, a sallow-faced individual with a sour expression, while the two sisters, obviously upset—the active one, in particular—were seated on chairs nearby, some underling in uniform standing behind them. John's escort went at once to the police officer, speaking in rapid Italian, while John himself, after a moment's hesitation, advanced toward the sisters.

"There has been a terrible mistake," he said. "I don't know how to apologize to you both. It's all my fault, mine entirely—the police are not to blame." The active sister made as though to rise, her mouth twitching nervously, but he restrained her.

"We don't understand," she said, the Scots inflection strong. "We said goodnight to your wife last night at dinner and we have not seen her since. The police came to our pension more than an hour ago and told us your wife was missing and you had filed a complaint against us. My sister is not very strong. She was considerably disturbed."

"A mistake. A frightful mistake," John repeated.

He turned toward the desk. The police officer was addressing him, his English very inferior to that of the previous interrogator. He had John's earlier statement on the desk in front of him and tapped it with a pencil. "So?" he queried. "This document all lies? You not speak the truth?"

"I believed it to be true at the time," said John. "I could have sworn in a court of law that I saw my wife with these two ladies on a vaporetto in the Grand Canal this afternoon. Now I realize I was mistaken."

"We have not been near the Grand Canal all day," protested the sister, "not even on foot. We made a few purchases in the Merceria this morning and remained indoors all afternoon. My sister was a little unwell. I have told the police officer this a dozen times and that the people at the pension would corroborate our story. He refused to listen."

"And the signora?" rapped the police officer angrily. "What happen to the signora?"

"The signora, my wife, is safe in England," explained John patiently. "I talked to her on the telephone just after seven. She did join the charter flight from the airport and is now staying with friends."

"Then who you see on the vaporetto in the red coat?" asked the furious police officer. "And if not these signorine here, then what signorine?"

"My eyes deceived me," said John, aware that his English was likewise becoming strained. "I think I see my wife and these ladies, but no, it was not so. My wife in aircraft, these ladies in pension all the time." It was like talking stage Chinese. In a moment he would be bowing and putting his hands in his sleeves.

The police officer raised his eyes to heaven and thumped the table. "So all this work for nothing," he said. "Hotels and pensiones searched for the signorine and a missing signora inglese, when here we have plenty, *plenty* other things to do. You make a mistake. You have perhaps too much vino at mezzo giorno and you see hundred signore in red coats in hundred vaporette." He stood up, rumpling the papers on his desk. "And you, signorine," he said, "you wish to make complaint against this person?" He was addressing the active sister.

"Oh, no," she said, "no, indeed. I quite see it was all a mistake. Our only wish is to return at once to our pension."

The police officer grunted. Then he pointed at John. "You very lucky man," he said. "These signorine could file complaint against you—very serious matter."

"I'm sure," said John. "I'll do anything in my power—"

"Please don't think of it," exclaimed the sister, horrified. "We would not hear of such a thing." It was her turn to apologize to the police officer. "I hope we need not take up any more of your valuable time," she said.

He waved a hand of dismissal and spoke in Italian to the underling. "This man walk with you to the pension," he said. "*Buona sera, signorine,*" and, ignoring John, he sat down again at his desk.

"I'll come with you," said John, "I want to explain exactly what happened."

They trooped down the stairs and out of the building, the blind sister leaning on her twin's arm. Once outside, she turned her sightless eyes to John. "You saw us," she said, "and your wife, too. But not today. You saw us in the future." Her voice was softer than her sister's, slower—she seemed to have some slight impediment in her speech.

"I don't follow," replied John, bewildered. He turned to the active sister and she shook her head at him, frowning, and put her finger on her lips.

"Come along, dear," she said to her twin. "You know you're very tired, and I want to get you home." Then, sotto voce to John: "She's

psychic. Your wife told you, I believe, but I don't want her to go into trance here in the street."

God forbid, thought John, and the little procession began to move slowly away from police headquarters, a canal to the left of them. Progress was slow because of the blind sister, and there were two bridges. John was completely lost after the first turning, but it couldn't have mattered less—their police escort was with them and the sisters knew where they were going.

"I must explain," said John softly, "my wife would never forgive me if I didn't," and as they walked he went over the whole inexplicable story once again, beginning with the telegram received the night before and the conversation with Mrs. Hill, the decision to return to England today, Laura by air and John by car and train. It no longer sounded as dramatic as it had done when he had made his statement to the police officer—when, possibly because of his conviction of something uncanny, the description of the two vapor-ettos passing one another in the middle of the Grand Canal had held a sinister quality, suggesting abduction on the part of the sisters, the pair of them holding a bewildered Laura captive. Now that neither of the women had any further menace for him, he spoke more naturally, yet with great sincerity, feeling for the first time that they were somehow both in sympathy with him and would understand.

"You see," he explained, in a final endeavor to make amends for having gone to the police in the first place, "I truly believed I had seen you with Laura and I thought—" he hesitated, because this had been the police officer's suggestion and not his—"I thought that perhaps Laura had some sudden loss of memory, had met you at the airport, and you had brought her back to Venice to wherever you were staying."

They had crossed a large square and were approaching a house at one end of it with a sign *Pensione* above the door. Their escort paused at the entrance. "Is this it?" asked John.

"Yes," said the sister. "I know it's nothing much from the outside, but it's clean and comfortable, and was recommended by friends." She turned to the escort. "*Grazie*," she said to him, "*grazie tanto*."

The man nodded briefly, wished them "*Buona notte*," and disappeared across the campo.

"Will you come in?" asked the sister. "I am sure we can find you some coffee, or perhaps you prefer tea?"

"No, really," John thanked her, "I must get back to the hotel. I'm

making an early start in the morning. I just want to make quite sure you do understand what happened, and that you forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," she replied. "It is one of the many examples of second sight that my sister and I have experienced time and time again, and I should very much like to record it for our files, if you will permit it."

"Well, as to that, of course," he told her, "but I myself find it hard to understand. It has never happened to me before."

"Not consciously, perhaps," she said, "but so many things happen to us of which we are not aware. My sister felt you had psychic understanding. She told your wife. She also told your wife last night in the restaurant that you were to experience trouble, danger, that you should leave Venice. Well, don't you believe now that the telegram was proof of this? Your son was ill, possibly dangerously ill, and so it was necessary for you to return home immediately. Heaven be praised your wife flew home to be by his side."

"Yes," said John. "But why should I see her on the vaporetto with you and your sister when she was actually on her way to England?"

"Thought transference, perhaps," she answered. "Your wife may have been thinking about us. We gave her our address, should she wish to get in touch with us. We shall be here another ten days. And she knows that we would pass on any message that my sister might have from your little one in the spirit world."

"Yes," said John awkwardly, "yes, I see. It's very good of you." He had a sudden rather unkind picture of the two sisters putting on headphones in their bedroom and listening for a coded message from poor Christine. "Look, this is our address in London," he said. "I know Laura will be pleased to hear from you."

He scribbled their address on a sheet torn from his pocket-diary—even, as a bonus thrown in, the telephone number—and handed it to her. He could imagine the outcome. Laura springing it on him one evening that the "old dears" were passing through London on their way to Scotland and the least they could do was to offer them hospitality, even the spare room for the night. Then a seance in the living room.

"Well, I must be off," he said. "Goodnight, and apologies, once again, for all that has happened this evening." He shook hands with the first sister, then turned to her blind twin. "I hope," he said, "that you are not too tired."

The sightless eyes were disconcerting. She held his hand fast and wouldn't let it go. "The child," she said, speaking in an odd staccato

voice, "the child. I can see the child—" and then, to his dismay, a bead of froth appeared at the corner of her mouth, her head jerked back, and she half collapsed in her sister's arms.

"We must get her inside," said the sister hurriedly. "It's all right, she's not ill, it's the beginning of a trance state."

Between them they helped the twin, who had gone rigid, into the house and sat her down on the nearest chair, her sister supporting her. A woman came running from some inner room. There was a strong smell of spaghetti from the back regions. "Don't worry," said the sister, "the signorina and I can manage. I think you had better go. Sometimes she is sick after these turns."

"I'm most frightfully sorry—" John began, but the sister had already turned her back and, with the other woman, was bending over her twin, from whom peculiar choking sounds were proceeding. He was obviously in the way, and after a final "Is there anything I can do?"—which received no reply—he turned and began walking across the square. He looked back once, and saw they had closed the door.

What a finale to the day! And all his fault. Poor old girls, first dragged to police headquarters and put through an interrogation, and then a psychic fit on top of it. Not much of a life for the other sister, but she seemed to take it in her stride. An additional hazard, though, if it happened in a restaurant or in the street. And not particularly welcome under his and Laura's roof should the sisters ever find themselves beneath it, which he prayed would never happen.

Meanwhile, where the devil was he? The square, with the inevitable church at one end, was quite deserted. He couldn't remember which way they had come from police headquarters, there had seemed to be so many turnings.

Wait a minute, the church itself had a familiar appearance. He drew nearer to it, looked for the name which was sometimes on notices at the entrance. San Giovanni in Bragora—that rang a bell. He and Laura had gone inside one morning to look at a painting by Cima da Conegliano. Surely it was only a stone's throw from the Riva degli Schiavoni and the open-wide waters of the San Marco lagoon, with all the bright lights of civilization and the strolling tourists? He remembered taking a small turning from the Schiavoni and they had arrived at the church. Wasn't that the alleyway ahead? He plunged along it, but halfway down he hesitated. It didn't seem right, although it was familiar for some unknown reason.

Then he realized that it wasn't the alley they had taken the morning they visited the church, but the one they had walked along the previous evening, only he was approaching it from the opposite direction. Yes, that was it—in which case it would be quicker to go on and cross the little bridge over the narrow canal, and he would find the Arsenal on his left and the street leading down to the Riva degli Schiavoni to his right. Simpler than retracing his steps and getting lost once more in the maze of back streets.

He had almost reached the end of the alley, and the bridge was in sight, when he saw the child. It was the same little girl with the pixie hood who had leaped between the tethered boats the preceding night and vanished up the cellar steps of one of the houses. This time she was running from the direction of the church on the other side, making for the bridge. She was running as if her life depended on it, and in a moment he saw why. A man was in pursuit, who, when she glanced backward for a moment, still running, flattened himself against a wall, believing himself unobserved. The child came on, scampering across the bridge, and John, fearful of alarming her further, backed into an open doorway that led into a small court.

He remembered the drunken yell of the night before which had come from one of the houses near where the man was hiding now. This is it, he thought, the fellow's after her again, and with a flash of intuition he connected the two events, the child's terror then and now, and the murders reported in the newspapers, supposedly the work of some madman. It could be coincidence, a child running from a drunken relative, and yet, and yet—His heart began thumping in his chest, instinct warning him to run himself, now, at once, back along the alley the way he had come. But what about the child? What was going to happen to the child?

Then he heard her running steps. She hurtled through the open doorway into the court in which he stood, not seeing him, making for the rear of the house that flanked it, where steps led presumably to a back entrance. She was sobbing as she ran, not the ordinary cry of a frightened child, but the panic-stricken intake of breath of a helpless being in despair. Were there parents in the house who would protect her, whom he could warn? He hesitated a moment, then followed her down the steps and through the door at the bottom, which had burst open at the touch of her hands as she hurled herself against it.

"It's all right!" he called. "I won't let him hurt you, it's all right—" cursing his lack of Italian, but possibly an English voice might

reassure her. But it was no use—she ran sobbing up another flight of stairs, which were spiral, twisting, leading to the floor above. It was too late for him to retreat. He could hear the pursuer in the courtyard behind, someone shouting in Italian, a dog barking. This is it, he thought, we're in it together, the child and I. Unless we can bolt some inner door above, he'll get us both.

He ran up the stairs after the child, who had darted into a room leading off a small landing, and followed her inside and slammed the door—and, merciful heaven, there was a bolt which he rammed into its socket. The child was crouching by the open window. If he shouted for help, someone would surely hear, someone would surely come before the man in pursuit threw himself against the door and it gave.

There was no one but themselves—no parents. The room was bare except for a mattress on an old bed and a heap of rags in one corner. "It's all right," John panted, "it's all right," and held out his hand, trying to smile.

The child struggled to her feet and stood before him, the pixie hood falling from her head onto the floor. He stared at her, incredulity turning to horror, to fear. It was not a child at all but a little thick-set woman dwarf, about three feet high, with a great square adult head too big for her body, grey locks hanging shoulder-length, and she wasn't sobbing any more, she was grinning at him, nodding her head up and down.

Then he heard the footsteps on the landing outside and the hammering on the door, and the barking dog, and not one voice but several voices shouting, "Open up! Police!" The creature fumbled in her sleeve, drawing a knife, and as she threw it at him with hideous strength, piercing his throat, he stumbled and fell, the sticky mess covering his protecting hands.

And he saw the vaporetto with Laura and the two sisters steaming down the Grand Canal, not today, not tomorrow, but the day after that, and he knew why they were together and for what purpose they had come. The creature was gibbering in its corner. The hammering and the voices and the barking dog grew fainter, and, Oh, God, he thought, what a bloody silly way to die.

"Q"



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